Analysis of the implementation of the EU optional quality term “mountain product”

Final report

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Acronyms

ANZM	National Agency for Mountain Area (Romania)
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
DRAAF	Regional Direction in charge of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (France)
EU	European Union
GI	Geographical indication
ICQRF	Department of Central Inspection for the Protection of Quality and Suppression of Fraud in agri-food products (Italy)
LAG	Local Action Group
MASAF	Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, and Forests (Italy)
MS	Member State
OQT	Optional quality term
PDO	Protected Denomination of Origin
PGI	Protected Geographical Indication
RDPs	Rural Development Programmes
TFUE	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
VC	Value chains

Executive summary

As part of the MOVING project, AREPO, in collaboration with Euromontana and Highclere Consulting (HCC), conducted an analysis on the implementation of the EU OQT “mountain product”. The analysis aimed to update existing data, assess its impact on farmers' incomes and local economies, evaluate consumer perception, and explore its relationship with other quality schemes. This analysis builds on Euromontana's previous studies on OQT implementation, focusing on legislative status and farmer uptake. Through double surveys directed at regional administrations and producers using the OQT "mountain product", this report presents key findings to inform evidence-based recommendations for strengthening the scheme.

Introduction

MOVING is a 4-years Horizon 2020 funded project whose main objective is to build capacities and co-develop relevant policy frameworks across Europe for the establishment of new or upgraded/upscaled value chains (VC) that contribute to the resilience and sustainability of mountain areas, using a bottom-up participatory process that engages value chain actors, stakeholders and policymakers. The project is developed in 23 European mountain regions.

One of MOVING main objectives is to deliver evidence-based recommendations and a performance-focused policy 'roadmap' for the updating/modernisation of relevant policy instruments to help build more resilient mountain value chains for private and public goods. Part of this endeavour involves focusing on EU quality policy, including EU geographical indication (GI) system and the optional quality term (OQT) "mountain product".

The OQT "mountain product" represents a significant development in the European Union's (EU) agricultural policy landscape for mountainous regions. Introduced by EU Regulation 1151/2012 and operationalised with conditions of use by EU Delegated Regulation 665/2014, the OQT aims to provide recognition and support for agricultural products originating from mountainous areas within the EU. This voluntary quality scheme serves as a mean to safeguard and promote the unique characteristics and heritage of agricultural production in these regions, acknowledging the challenges and opportunities associated with mountain farming. With its implementation, producers have the option to label their products with the "mountain product" designation, signifying adherence to specific criteria related to production, processing, and geographical origin.

Against this background, within the MOVING project, AREPO in collaboration with Euromontana and Highclere Consulting (HCC), carried out an analysis on the implementation of the EU OQT "mountain product". The aim was to update the available data, to explore its impact on farmers' incomes and local economies, to evaluate consumer perception, and to examine its complementarity or overlap with other quality schemes. These needs were identified and presented by Euromontana during the MOVING EU MAP webinar "European Quality schemes: the added value for mountain value chains", on 8 November 2022.

In particular, these research areas are usually included in Euromontana study on OQT implementation aimed at assessing the legislative status of the OQT at the national level and examining farmer uptake. As a consequence, part of this analysis will feed into the updating of Euromontana study.

To cover the various research questions, AREPO run a double survey directed to regional administrations and producers using the OQT "mountain product". This report analyses the main results of the surveys with the aim to contribute to develop evidence-based recommendations to further strengthen the OQT "mountain product".

1. Methodology

The survey objectives were to collect qualitative and quantitative data on the impact of the implementation of the OQT "mountain product".

In collaboration with Euromontana and HCC, AREPO drafted two versions of the survey in order to address two different targets:

1) regional/local administrations and
2) producers registered to use the OQT.

The surveys were disseminated mainly through AREPO and Euromontana networks as well as through MOVING consortium, which together assure a widespread geographic coverage of mountainous areas in Europe.

1.1. Survey for regional administrations

The survey for **regional administrations** had the objective to **gather information concerning the implementation of the OQT at national level**, to collect **good practices** by regional producers and/or producer associations, and to assess its **impact at territorial level**.

To this end it was structured in six sections[1]:

A. Contact details;
B. Brief description of the mountainous area concerned in the region;
C. Supporting measure for the OQT "mountain product";
D. Producers' uptake and & impact at territorial level;
E. To go further on producers' uptake; and
F. Barriers, threats and policy recommendations.

The survey was drafted online on Limesurvey in a multilingual format: it was available in English, French, Italian and Spanish. It was sent to 30 AREPO member regions[2] at the end of April 2023 and it was closed at the end of June 2023.

Overall, the survey collected **12 replies** distributed as follows: **7 from Italy** (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lombardia, Piemonte, Toscana, Valle d'Aosta, Veneto), **2 from Germany** (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria) and **3 from France** (Corse[3], Grand Est, Occitanie).

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[1] See the Annex I to read the full survey for regional administrations.
[2] AREPO member regions are distributed geographically as follows: 7 from France, 3 from Germany, 6 from Greece, 8 from Italy, 1 from Portugal and 5 from Spain.
[3] Corsica (Corse) replied that there are no producers using the OQT "mountain product" in the region. While there are no inherent obstacles preventing its adoption, this absence can be attributed to several factors depending from the sector. First of all, concerning both cheese and charcuterie the primary challenge lies in the differentiation between farmhouse and industrial products. Ence, the producers are not interested in differentiate their products based on the geographical origin. On the other hand, the veal sector, which could potentially benefit from the OQT, is predominantly focused on promoting the Corsican breed. Finally,

It should be pointed out that Greece, Portugal and Spain still haven't adapted their legislation to implement the OQT at national level. This explains the lack of replies from the regional authorities from those countries.

1.2. Survey for producers

The survey for producers had the objective to gather qualitative and quantitative data to collect **preliminary feedback on the impact of the OQT for producers**.

To this end it was structured in five sections[4]:

A. Contact details;
B. Data on producers;
C. Knowledge of the OQT mountain product;
D. Access to the scheme;
E. Evaluation.

The survey was drafted online on Limesurvey in a multilingual format: it was available in English, French, Italian and Romanian. It was disseminated through AREPO and Euromontana networks, as well as through MOVING's social media. The survey has been running from the end of May until mid-September 2023.

Based on the replies received from regions and the information contained in Euromontana study (2020), the survey for producers targeted three specific countries: **France, Italy and Romania**.

The survey received a total of **210 replies.** Among these, there were **150 responses from Italy**, which accounted for approximately 12% of the producers registered in the Italian list concerning producers using the OQT scheme. Furthermore, there were **57 from Romania** which accounted for approximately 13% of the producers targeted with the survey[5]. Thus, for both Italy and Romania the survey registered a significant participation rate among mountain producers.

On the other hand, there were only **3 responses from France**. This lower number of responses can be attributed to a specific administrative detail: the absence of a list of registered producers for the OQT "mountain product" in France. Unlike Italy and Romania, where such lists exist, the lack of a comprehensive database in France made it more challenging to identify and target

Corsica boasts traditional mountain vegetable sectors with existing Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) certifications for products such as chestnut flour and olive oil. These established certifications may deter producers from pursuing the OQT, as they already possess recognised quality labels that serve their marketing and branding needs effectively. Thus, the presence of alternative certifications and the focus on regional breeds and traditional sectors currently limit OQT adoption in the region.

[4] See the Annex II to read the full survey for producers using the OQT "mountain product".

[5] Based on the total number of Romanian producers that registered products in the OQT mountain product scheme (1.326 as of the end of June 2023), the response rate would be of 4.3%. Nevertheless, after excluding duplicates, producers who didn't provide their contact details, and those selected for another MOVING case study, focused on the Făgăraș, Bucegi and Sudică Mountain Massifs, the final number of producers who received the survey is 441, representing a response rate of 12.92%.

French producers who are part of the OQT scheme. Consequently, the lower response rate from France reflects the difficulty in reaching and engaging French producers in the survey process.

Overall, the higher number of responses from Italy and Romania compared to France underscores the importance of administrative infrastructure and resources in facilitating survey outreach and participation among producers. The existence of registered producer lists in Italy and Romania likely streamlined the survey distribution process and enabled a more comprehensive representation of producers' perspectives from these countries.

Given the greater statistical relevance of the survey on producers, it became the primary focus of the following analysis. Insights gleaned from the survey for regional administrations will be incorporated, providing additional context and perspectives to complement the producer survey findings. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the OQT scheme's implementation and impact across different geographical regions, offering valuable insights for policy development.

2. Implementation at national level

As reminded in the introduction, EU Regulation 1151/2012 and EU Delegated Regulation 665/2014 define **stringent criteria** that products must meet to qualify for the Optional Quality Term “mountain product”.

First of all, the OQT can be used to describe products intended for human consumption listed in Annex I to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFUE). It concerns the vast majority of agri-food products (animal origin products such as milk and dairy products, eggs, meat products, honey, and plants). The regulation does not apply to spirit drinks, flavoured wines, or vine products, with the exception of wine vinegars, due to the specific regulations and requirements governing these categories of products.

Furthermore, both **raw materials and animal feed** should come essentially from mountain areas:

- For **products of animal origin**, such as meat and dairy, specific requirements are outlined, including that at least two-thirds of the animal's life must be spent in mountain areas, with a quarter of that time dedicated to transhumance grazing on mountain pastures.
- Additionally, for **feedstuffs**, a significant portion of the annual diet must be sourced from mountain areas, with different thresholds for various animal species.

The **processing** of these products is also regulated, stipulating that processing **must occur within mountain areas** to maintain the integrity of the OQT.

At the **Member States**' level, there is flexibility to define **derogations** for processing outside of mountain areas within a specified distance of maximum 30 km[6] and to establish conditions for **controls**[7]. A MS can also decide to introduce and regulate the use of a national logo for the OQT.

Euromontana study (2020) on the implementation of the OQT at national level identified three types of Member States:

- the ones which directly apply the EU regulation (Austria);
- the ones which have adapted their national laws to the EU regulation (**France**, Germany, **Italy**, **Romania**, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia); and
- those which did not yet adapt their national laws to implement the OQT "mountain product" (Portugal, Spain, UK/Scotland, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia, Poland, Finland and Sweden).

Thus, before starting to delve into the analysis of the surveys, the following subsections will analyse how Italy, France and Romania have adapted their national laws to implement the OQT "mountain product". It should be noted that France and Italy are the two EU MS that previously had legislation governing the use of the term "mountain". Consequently, with the implementation of EU regulations, these laws required revision.

Finally, the analysis will present and examine the general implementation data available for Italy and Romania, both of which maintain a national list of registered OQT producers/products.

2.1. France

The valorisation of mountain products through the use of the "mountain" designation was initiated by public authorities in France in the 1980s. After the introduction of the OQT "mountain product" at EU level, the French and the EU designation coexist, regulated by public authorities. Nevertheless, the use of the French designation is now limited to a few products, mainly **water**[8].

On the other hand, the **EU Optional Quality Term "mountain product" is used for the vast majority of agri-food products** (animal origin products such as milk and dairy products, eggs, meat products, honey, and plants), that is products intended for human consumption listed in Annex 1 of the TFUE.

The technical instruction DGPAAT/SDOE/2014-579 detailed the application of the EU and national terms. Here the analysis will focus on the **OQT "mountain product".**

Producers can use the OQT "mountain product" as long as they comply with the conditions of use defined in the European regulations. They **do not need an authorisation in order to start using the term,** as it was the case under the previous national legislation. However, operators wishing to use the OQT are invited to inform the Regional Direction in charge of Agriculture, Food

[6] Article 6 of Delegated Regulation (EU) No 665/2014.
[7] Article 34 of Regulation (EU) 1151/12.
[8] The French designation "mountain" can be used for non-transformed non-food agricultural products and agricultural products intended for human consumption, other than those listed in Annex 1 of the TFUE.

and Forestry (DRAAF) in the Region where the production takes place. The DRAAF is available to assist and inform interested producers of the regulatory requirements.

The use of the OQT “mountain product” is free of charge.

No official logo has been adopted by French authorities for the OQT “mountain product”. The complete designation "mountain product" must be used on the labelling of products and their advertising, but there are no specific requirement concerning the format.

Regarding **derogations**, France decided not to shorten the distance for processing outside of mountainous regions. As a consequence, the 30km derogation applies for all categories of products.

The Directorate General for Competition, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control (DGCCRF) is responsible for **monitoring and control** the use of the OQT “mountain product” at local level. The producers must be able to justify at any time, through a **traceability system**, compliance with the requirements set out in EU legislation.

Euromontana study (2020) highlights that numerous French producers that previously employed the French designation have transitioned to using the EU OQT. However, the **lack of a national register complicates obtaining a comprehensive overview of the number of producers and products using it.**

2.2. Italy

In 2017, the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, and Forests (MASAF) adopted the Ministerial Decree of 26 July 2017 n. 51167, in order to adapt the EU regulation for national application, defining the conditions of use of the OQT "mountain product", the derogations for processing outside mountain areas, the obligations of operators, and the control methods. Further instructions are contained in the Ministerial Decree of 20 July 2018, defining guidelines regarding the origin of foodstuffs intended for animals feeding.

The Decree n. 51167 introduces as well a **national logo** and the condition of use are defined by the Ministerial Decree of 2 August 2018. The logo should be used, free of charge, by all producers authorised to use the optional quality term complying with the requirements of EU legislation. Other brands, symbols, and logos that qualify the product based on different standards (i.e. EU organic logo, PDO/PGI logos) can be used in conjunction with the aforementioned logo, as long as it does not generate confusion among consumers[9].

The logo consists of stylised green mountains to further emphasise the products’ connection with the mountainous territory and to make them more recognisable in the market to consumers.

[9] Ministerial Decree of 2 August 2018, art. 2 on Conditions of Use.

Figure 1: Italian logo for OQT “mountain product”.

Reference: Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests.

Regarding **derogations** on the distance of processing, Italy opted at first for reducing at 10km the derogation for milk and milk products and leaving untouched the 30km derogation for meat and olive oil. Nevertheless, since 2022 the derogation has been reinstated at **30km for all categories of products**, following the adoption of a Ministerial Decree modifying the previous one on this matter[10].

Furthermore, this legislative act established **national guidelines for controls** which have been put in place at the market level, meaning that producers would be controlled only after they have started to use the OQT. Operators must ensure full traceability of mountain products, both for raw materials and animal feed. In order to guarantee adequate monitoring, the competent control bodies, such as the Department of Central Inspection for the Protection of Quality and Suppression of Fraud in agri-food products (ICQRF), are responsible for periodically verifying compliance with the conditions of use of the OQT.

Regions play a significant role in **monitoring and controlling** the use of the optional quality term. In fact, they are in charge of the procedure for authorisation for use: mountain producers and/or processors willing to use the optional quality term “mountain product” must complete a special form[11] and submit it to the Region where the production takes place within thirty days from the start of production. This registration process is free of charge.

Each Region must set a list of regional operators requesting to use the OQT, keep it up to date and publish it on the regional website. Furthermore, every 6 months regional authorities must send the updated list to the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, and Forests to be published on its official website.

[10] Decreto di modifica del decreto del Ministro delle politiche agricola, alimentari e forestali del 26 luglio 2017, n. 51167 recante disposizioni nazionali per l’attuazione del regolamento (UE) n. 1151/12 e del regolamento delegato (UE) n. 665/2014 sulle condizioni d’utilizzo dell’indicazione facoltativa di qualità “prodotto di montagna”.

[11] Annex 2 to the Ministerial Decree of 26 July 2017, n. 51167.

As a result of the information requested in the form, the lists of regional operators contain the following information:

Company references:

- Company name:
- VAT number:
- Address:
- Telephone:
- Email or certified mail:
- Company name and address of the processing site (if different from the main one)

Category of farm products concerned by the Optional Quality Term "mountain product":

- Fresh meat
- Meat products
- Milk, cheeses and dairy products
- Eggs
- Fresh fruit, vegetables and cereals
- Processed fruit, vegetables and cereals
- Honey and other bee products
- Oils and fats

Furthermore, the operator should specify if the **processing and transformation** of the products (transformation of milk, slaughtering of animals and cutting and deboning of carcasses, and pressing of olive oil) is done **in a mountainous area or outside** (respecting the maximum distance of 30 km).

Since every region has its own list, it was possible to create a database with all Italian operators downloading all the regional documents from the MASAF website. The data were collected and organised in May 2023, in order to send the survey to all operators in the list.

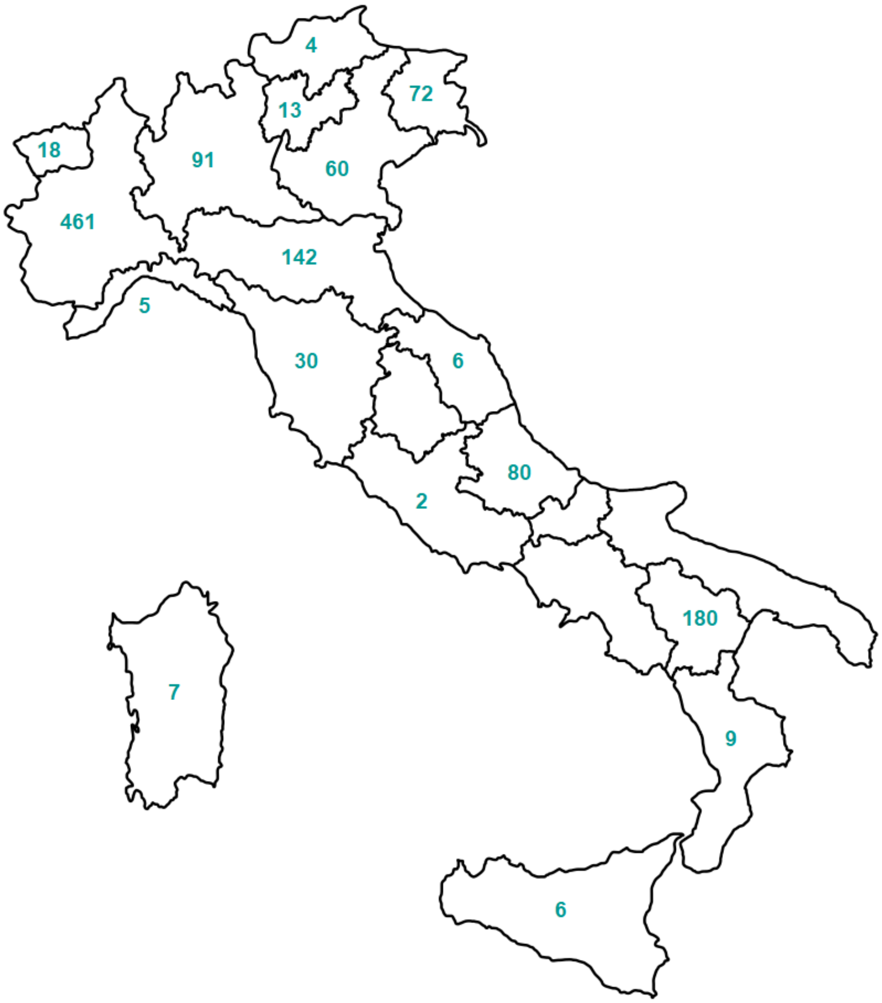
Table 1 shows the number of Italian producers who requested to use the Optional Quality Term "mountain product", categorised by region and year of adhesion.

Table 1: Number of requests to use the OQT by region and year.

Regions	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total	%
Abruzzo	2	34	14	11	4	15	-	**80**	6.75%
Basilicata	0	57	12	37	71	3	-	**180**	15.18%
Bolzano	0	1	1	2	0	0	-	**4**	0.34%
Calabria	0	0	3	2	3	1	-	**9**	0.76%
Emilia-Romagna	38	27	22	35	18	2	-	**142**	11.97%
Friuli Venezia Giulia	16	0	14	10	32	0	-	**72**	6.07%
Lazio	0	1	0	0	1	0	-	**2**	0.17%
Liguria	0	0	2	0	0	3	-	**5**	0.42%
Lombardia	13	24	12	7	15	16	4	**91**	7.67%
Marche	6	0	0	0	0	0	-	**6**	0.51%
Piemonte	4	107	102	74	72	102	-	**461**	38.87%
Sardegna	0	0	1	3	3	0	-	**7**	0.59%
Sicilia	0	0	0	0	6	0	-	**6**	0.51%
Toscana	0	4	2	6	16	2	-	**30**	2.53%
Trento	1	5	1	2	2	2	-	**13**	1.10%
Valle d'Aosta	2	4	3	4	5	0	-	**18**	1.52%
Veneto	1	11	16	8	22	2	-	**60**	5.06%
Total	79	255	185	187	241	144	4	**1186**	100.00%

Reference: elaborated using the regional databases of requests to use the OQT "mountain product" published on MASAF website (consulted in May 2023).

Figure 2: Map of the number of requests to use the OQT by region.



Source: elaborated using the regional databases of requests to use the OQT "mountain product" published on MASAF website (consulted in May 2023).

As the table 1 shows the MASAF received 1186 applications in total[12]. It is observed that there is considerable variation in the number of producers across regions and years. **Piemonte** stands out as the region with the highest number of producers across all years, with a total of **461** producers registered by 2023. Other regions, such as **Basilicata (180)** and **Emilia-Romagna (142)**, also show substantial participation in the OQT. However, some regions have minimal or no participation.

[12] The regional databases were downloaded and consulted in May 2023.

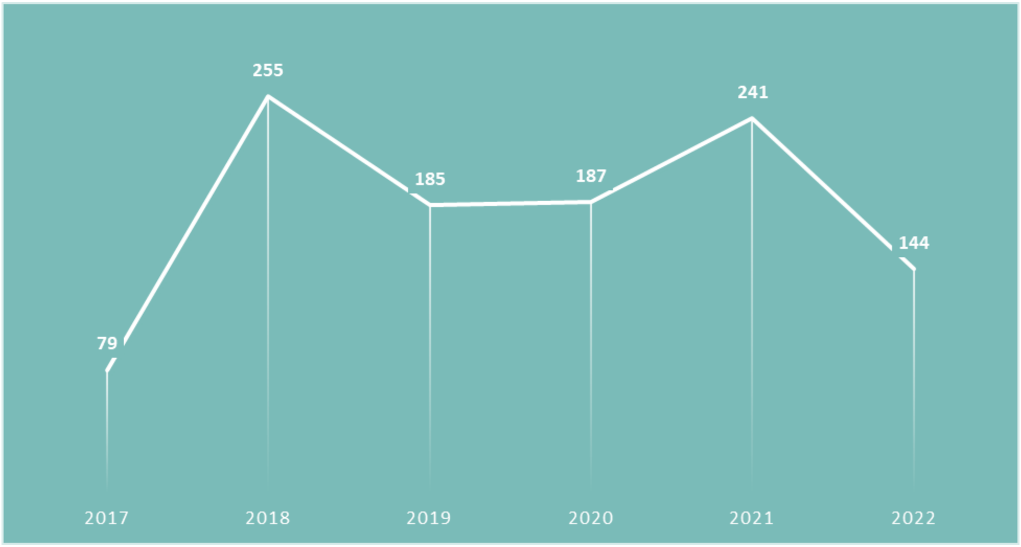
Particularly striking is the low number of applications received in Valle d'Aosta and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, the only totally mountainous Italian regions. As suggested by Bentivoglio et al. (2019), the low number of requests is probably justified by the presence of other pre-existing protection and valorisation tools, such as regional brands, which are particularly supported by local administrations and recognised by consumers.

There are no requests from Umbria, Molise, Campania and Puglia.

It is important to note that **these are requests to use the OQT and not all operators in the list are actually using it**. In fact, there is no obligation to notify the regional authorities when an operator ceases to use the OQT. As a result, there are operators that presented the request and never used the OQT and others who used it for a while and then stopped. There are also operators who closed their business for good, but still appear on the list. So, **the actual number of operators using the OQT is surely lower than the total requests**.

Thanks to the protocol number under which the request was registered, it is possible to sort the applications by year.

Figure 3: Number of new requests to use the OQT by year.

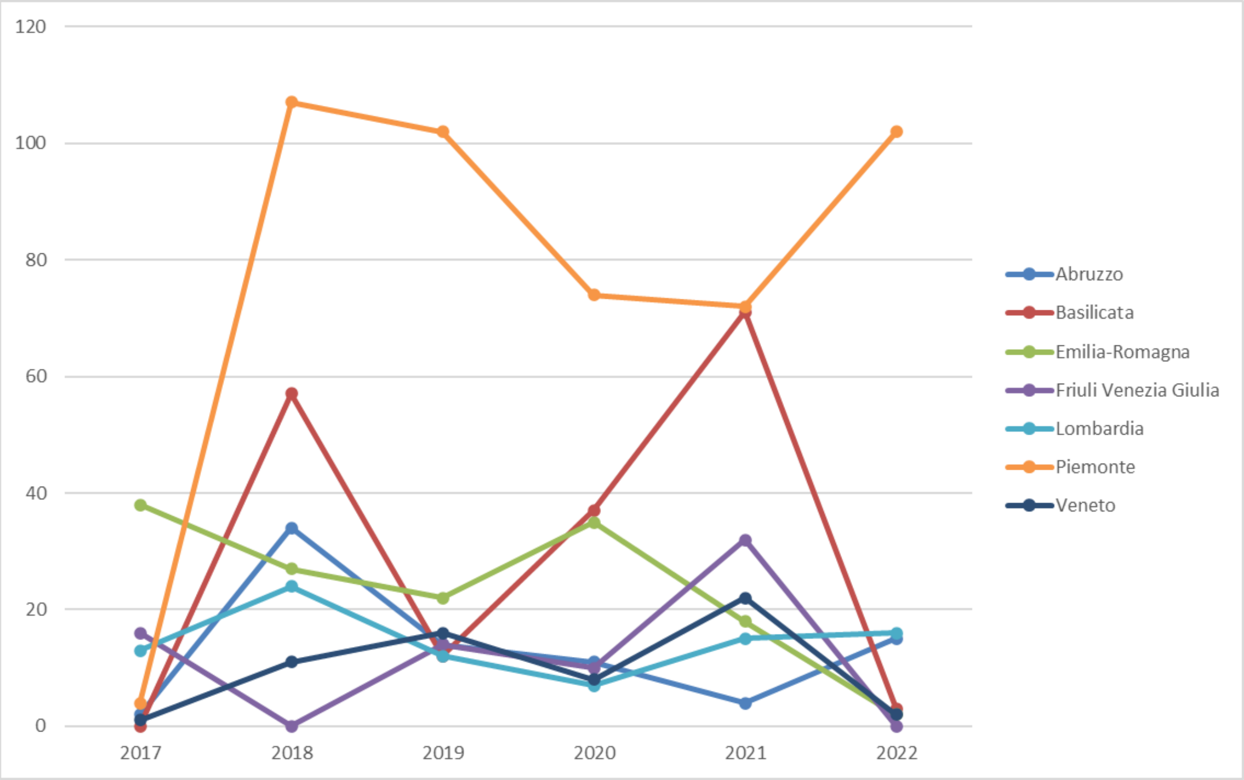


Source: elaborated using the regional databases of requests to use the OQT "mountain product" published on MASAF website (consulted in May 2023).

Figure 3 shows the number of new requests to use the OQT "mountain product" received by the MASAF every year since 2017. **The overall trend in the total number of new requests from 2017 to 2022 exhibits fluctuations**. Initially, in 2017, the number of requests was at its lowest, followed by a sharp increase in 2018, marking the highest peak. Subsequently, there was a slight decrease in requests in both 2019 and 2020, although they remained relatively stable during these years. Another peak occurred in 2021, but this was succeeded by a decline, resulting in the lowest value observed in 2022 since the start of implementation in 2017.

Following the surge in requests during the initial years of implementation, it is reasonable to assume that **a significant portion of interested producers have already opted to join the OQT**. Consequently, a decline in new requests can be viewed as a natural development. However, it is crucial to remain vigilant and closely monitor this trend in the coming years to understand if the OQT have met with some sort of obstacle in reaching new producers.

Figure 4: Number of new requests to use the OQT received by each region by year[13].



Source: elaborated using the regional databases of requests to use the OQT "mountain product" published on MASAF website (consulted in May 2023).

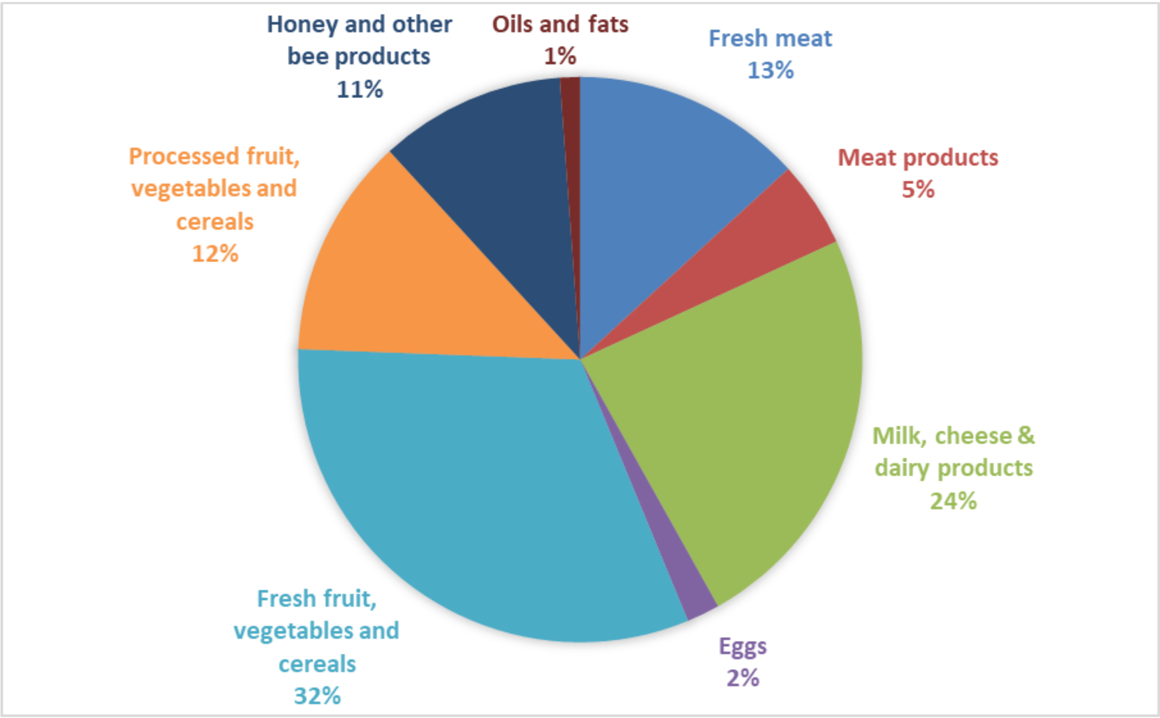
Figure 4 display the number of new requests to use the OQT "mountain product" received by each region every year since 2017. While overall the regional trends follow the national one, **Piemonte stands out since it witnessed a new peak of requests in 2022.**

The **distribution of requests to use the OQT by product category** (Figure 5) shows a predominance of fresh fruits, vegetables, and cereals (32%), followed by milk, cheese and dairy products (24%), which together represent 56% of the requests. Fresh meats (13%), processed fruit, vegetables and cereals (12%), and honey (11%) still represent a relevant part of requests to

[13] For statistical relevance of the data analysis, only regions with 60 or more requests are taken into account in regional analysis (representing at least 5% of total requests).

use the OQT (around 36%). Finally, meat products (5%), eggs (2%) and oil and fats (1%) represent less than 10% of the total requests[14].

Figure 5: Distribution of requests to use the OQT by product category (%)



Source: elaborated using the regional databases of requests to use the OQT "mountain product" published on MASAF website (consulted in May 2023).

Looking more in detail, figure 6 provides insights into the main categories of products registered by each region, highlighting their areas of specialisation within the OQT scheme. It points out two different trends, with some regions focusing on specific categories of products while others have a more diversified range of registrations.

In particular, the regions where the requests of use are more specialised on one category are Abruzzo, where the vast majority of requests registered concern fresh fruit, vegetables, and cereals (81%), Friuli Venezia Giulia and Veneto with respectively 58% and 43% of requests on milk, cheese and dairy products.

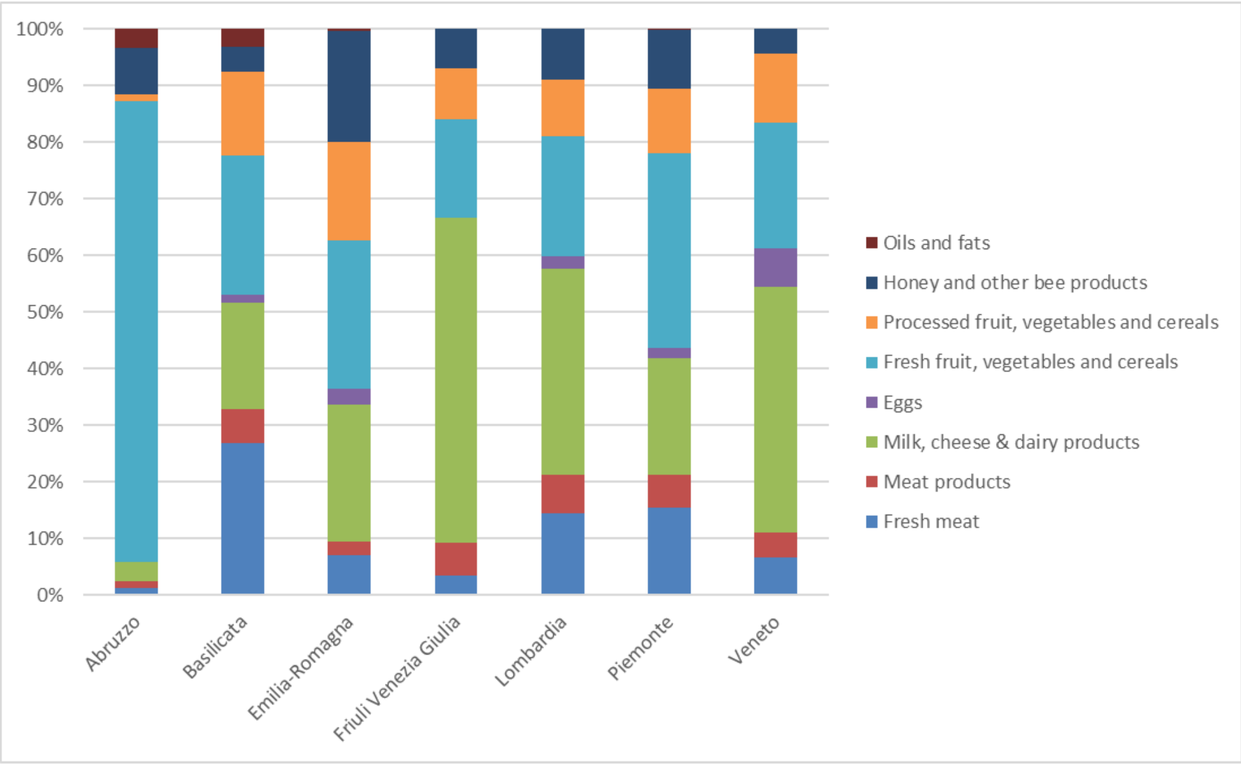
Specialisation is less evident in Lombardia, Piemonte, Emilia-Romagna and Basilicata, presenting a more diversified range of registrations. For the first three regions, fresh fruit,

[14] It should be noted that the data available concern the number of requests of use of the OQT "mountain product" received by Italian regions. Other relevant data, like to volume of production of each producer for each product are not available and may lead to different conclusions. For instance, the distribution of volume of production by product category could be different from the distribution of requests by product category.

vegetables, and cereals on one side and milk, cheese and dairy products on the other concentrate together more than half of the requests. This confirms the predominance of these two sectors also at regional level.

Finally, Basilicata represent an exception since the requests received are dominated by meat products (26%), followed closely by fresh fruit, vegetables, and cereals (24%).

Figure 6: Distribution (%) of requests to use the OQT at regional level by product category[15].



Source: elaborated using the regional databases of requests to use the OQT "mountain product" published on MASAF website (consulted in May 2023).

Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the number of requests made to each region for using the OQT, categorised by product type. It is important to understand that when a producer submits a request to use the OQT, they may apply for one or multiple products simultaneously. To present the data in Table 2 accurately, applications encompassing multiple products have been separated to calculate the total number for each category. As a result, the cumulative totals in Table 2 exceed those reported by region in Table 1.

[15] For statistical relevance of the data analysis, only regions with 60 or more requests are taken into account in regional analysis (representing at least 5% of total requests).

Table 2: Distribution of requests to use the OQT by region and product category (number).

Regions	Fresh meat	Meat products	Milk, cheese & dairy products	Eggs	Fresh fruit, vegetables and cereals	Processed fruit, vegetables and cereals	Honey and other bee products	Oils and fats	Total
Abruzzo	1	1	3	0	70	1	7	3	86
Basilicata	60	13	42	3	55	33	10	7	223
Bolzano	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	5
Calabria	1	1	0	0	8	5	2	0	17
Emilia-Romagna	15	5	51	6	55	37	41	1	211
Friuli Venezia Giulia	3	5	50	0	15	8	6	0	87
Lazio	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
Liguria	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	2	7
Lombardia	19	9	48	3	28	13	12	0	132
Marche	1	0	2	0	1	2	2	2	10
Piemonte	104	39	139	13	231	77	71	1	675
Sardegna	0	0	4	0	2	0	1	0	7
Sicilia	4	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	8
Toscana	2	2	3	0	17	11	8	3	46
Trento	0	0	1	0	6	3	7	0	17
Valle d'Aosta	0	0	1	0	12	5	2	0	20
Veneto	6	4	39	6	20	11	4	0	90
Total	217	81	390	31	523	207	175	19	1624

Reference: elaborated using the regional databases of requests to use the OQT "mountain product" published on MASAF website (consulted in May 2023).

Table 3: Distribution of requests to use the OQT by region and product category (%).

Regions	Fresh meat	Meat products	Milk, cheese & dairy products	Eggs	Fresh fruit, vegetables and cereals	Processed fruit, vegetables and cereals	Honey and other bee products	Oils and fats
Abruzzo	1.16%	1.16%	3.49%	0.00%	81.40%	1.16%	8.14%	3.49%
Basilicata	26.91%	5.83%	18.83%	1.35%	24.66%	14.80%	4.48%	3.14%
Bolzano	20.00%	20.00%	40.00%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Calabria	5.88%	5.88%	0.00%	0.00%	47.06%	29.41%	11.76%	0.00%
Emilia-Romagna	7.11%	2.37%	24.17%	2.84%	26.07%	17.54%	19.43%	0.47%
Friuli Venezia Giulia	3.45%	5.75%	57.47%	0.00%	17.24%	9.20%	6.90%	0.00%
Lazio	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%
Liguria	0.00%	0.00%	14.29%	0.00%	28.57%	14.29%	14.29%	28.57%
Lombardia	14.39%	6.82%	36.36%	2.27%	21.21%	9.85%	9.09%	0.00%
Marche	10.00%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%	10.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%
Piemonte	15.41%	5.78%	20.59%	1.93%	34.22%	11.41%	10.52%	0.15%
Sardegna	0.00%	0.00%	57.14%	0.00%	28.57%	0.00%	14.29%	0.00%
Sicilia	50.00%	12.50%	37.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Toscana	4.35%	4.35%	6.52%	0.00%	36.96%	23.91%	17.39%	6.52%
Trento	0.00%	0.00%	5.88%	0.00%	35.29%	17.65%	41.18%	0.00%
Valle d'Aosta	0.00%	0.00%	5.00%	0.00%	60.00%	25.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Veneto	6.67%	4.44%	43.33%	6.67%	22.22%	12.22%	4.44%	0.00%
Total	13.36%	4.99%	24.01%	1.91%	32.20%	12.75%	10.78%	1.17%

Reference: elaborated using the regional databases of requests to use the OQT "mountain product" published on MASAF website (consulted in May 2023).

2.3. Romania

In Romania, the use of the optional quality term "mountain product" is established through the Decision no. 506/2016 and Order no. 174/2021 and it is **coordinated by the National Agency for Mountain Area (ANZM)**, a public institution subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The National Agency of Mountain Area covers the entire mountain region through its 7 regional development centres and its 32 mountain development offices. In Romania, the mountain area is defined by Law no. 197/2018, and every land administrative unit part of the mountain area is explicitly mentioned.

In 2019, Romania adopted a **national logo** for mountain products (Order 49/2019), to better signal the term and to help consumers identify and differentiate the products using the OQT from similar products.

Figure 7: Romanian logo for OQT "mountain product".

Reference: Order 49/2019.

In addition to the logo, registered producers are provided with a **QR code** for each product, serving as authentication of the attestation. This QR code links to the corresponding data entry on the list of all mountain products, which is maintained by the National Mountain Area Agency on a dedicated website.

Regarding the **processing** stage, Romanian regulation provides the **same derogation as the EU regulation**. The following processing activities may take place outside mountain areas, but not further than 30 km outside the boundary:

- Milk and dairy processing in processing units that were operational on Jan 3, 2013;
- Slaughtering of animals and cutting and deboning of carcasses.

Control and verification procedure is regulated by Order no. 174/2021. The term **verification** refers to the *ex-ante* analysis of producer's applications, aiming at checking if they comply with all the conditions to use the term. On the other hand, **controls** take place on producers after obtaining the right to use the OQT. The National Consumers Protection Authority oversees market controls to verify whether producers have been authorised to use the OQT and whether labelling complies with national regulations.

The ex-ante verification process implies that producers and/or processors willing **to use the optional quality term "mountain products''** must complete a **form and a procedures book form** (Annex 1 to the Order 174/2021) and submit them, together with a list of proof documents, to the mountain development office to which the producer/processor belongs to. After the situation is **verified** (also including an on-site verification), the producer/processor receives the **right to use** the OQT "mountain product". This registration process is **free of charge**.

The National Agency for Mountain Area is monthly updating the National Registry for Mountain Products, making the latest version available on its official website and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development website. It should be highlighted this database lists all the **products** using the OQT, not the producers like in the Italian case. For this reason, one producer can have more entries in the list, according with the number of registered products. **Therefore, the number of the total producers using the OQT (1.326) is far lower than the number of registered products (3.777).** The National Registry for Mountain Products integrates information concerning:

Product references:

- Year
- County
- Address
- Name of the producer/processor
- Decision no.
- Contact details
- Other observations.

Category of farm products concerned by the optional quality indication mountain product:

- Bee products
- Bread, bakery and pastry products
- Eggs
- Fish and fish products
- Meat and meat products
- Milk and dairy products
- Vegetable and/or fruit products

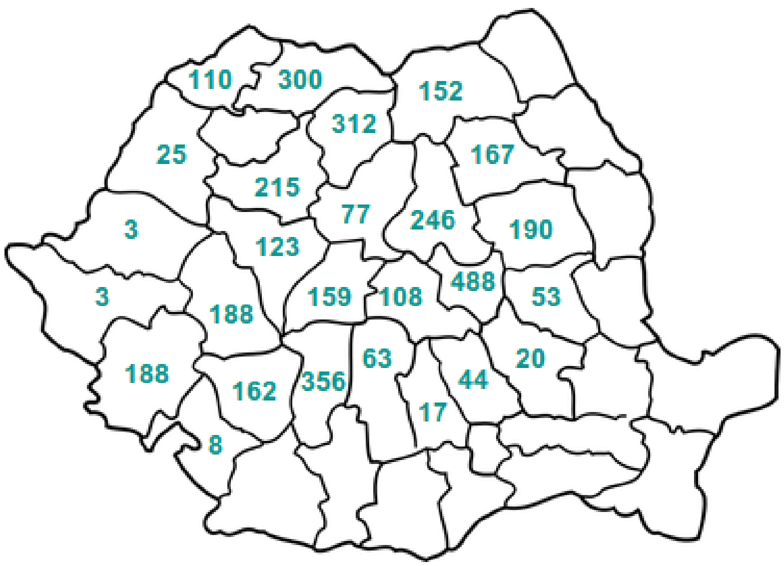
The data presented in the following section was processed in June 2023, to ensure homogeneity at the level of reporting.

Table 4 shows the number of Romanian product applications to use the optional quality term "mountain product", categorised by region and year of adhesion.

It shows that the ANZM received **3.777 product applications, corresponding to a total of 1.326 registered producers**. While in the first three years of implementation (i.e. 2017, 2018 and 2019), the number of applications is relatively small, there is an important increase between 2020 and 2021, followed by a steep decrease in 2022 and 2023[16]. **Covasna** County has the highest number of registered products, with a total of **488** products registered by 2023 (representing 12,92% of all the registrations). Other counties, such as **Vâlcea (356)** and **Bistrița-Năsăud (312)** also show substantial participation in OQT. However, some regions have minimal participation, as is the case of Timiș, Arad and Mehedinți, where the mountain area is comparatively lower. The only county with mountain area, but with no requests is Sălaj.

It is important to note that **these are product applications to use the OQT and not all operators in the list are actually using it for their registered products**. The producers/processors have no obligation to notify the ANZM if they are not using the OQT (i.e.: using the mountain product logo). Therefore, a part of producers/processors with products registered in the list, while having the right to use the OQT "mountain product", have either not used it from the beginning or stopped using it. Thus, the number of products using the OQT "mountain product" is lower than the total number of registrations.

Figure 8: Map of the number of product registrations for the OQT "mountain product" by county.



Reference: elaborated using the national registry for the OQT "mountain product" published on ANZM website (consulted in June 2023)

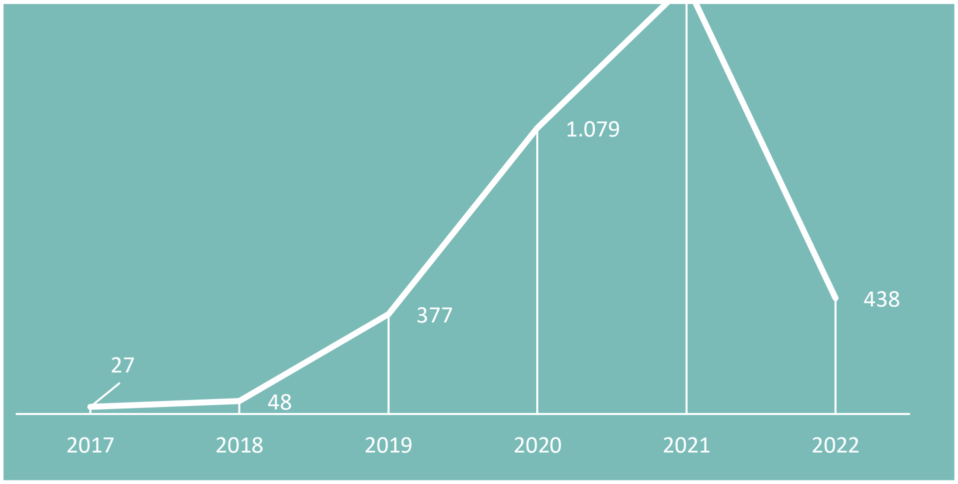
[16] For 2023, we must take into consideration that only the data for the first half of the year is considered in this analysis.

Table 4: Number of product registrations for the OQT "mountain product" by county and year.

Counties	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total	%
Alba	-	-	-	24	51	34	14	123	3.26%
Arad	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	3	0.08%
Argeș	2	-	-	21	29	11	-	63	1.67%
Bacău	-	5	-	73	86	26	-	190	5.03%
Bihor	-	-	2	3	-	5	5	25	0.66%
Bistrița-Năsăud	-	-	42	90	64	16	-	312	8.26%
Brașov	-	-	5	4	71	22	6	108	2.86%
Buzău	-	-	4	11	1	2	2	20	0.53%
Caraș-Severin	7	2	17	10	6	59	27	188	4.98%
Cluj	-	-	53	12	20	23	7	215	5.69%
Covasna	2	6	9	1	321	43	36	488	12.92%
Dâmbovița	-	-	-	-	15	2	-	17	0.45%
Gorj	-	5	15	57	61	16	8	162	4.29%
Harghita	3	1	14	97	94	17	20	246	6.51%
Hunedoara	-	-	31	94	23	27	13	188	4.98%
Maramureș	-	-	-	187	80	23	10	300	7.94%
Mehedinți	-	-	-	-	5	3	-	8	0.21%
Mureș	3	-	8	22	9	34	1	77	2.04%
Neamț	-	14	13	26	114	-	-	167	4.42%
Prahova	-	-	4	16	24	-	-	44	1.16%
Satu Mare	-	-	-	80	16	5	9	110	2.91%
Sibiu	-	-	18	66	51	24	-	159	4.21%
Suceava	-	5	7	28	67	22	23	152	4.02%
Timiș	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	3	0.08%
Vâlcea	-	-	91	123	135	4	3	356	9.43%
Vrancea	-	-	1	11	21	20	-	53	1.40%
TOTAL	27	48	377	1,079	1,624	438	184	3,777	100.00%

Reference: elaborated using the national registry for the OQT "mountain product" published on ANZM website (consulted in June 2023).

Figure 9: Number of product registrations for the OQT "mountain product" by year.

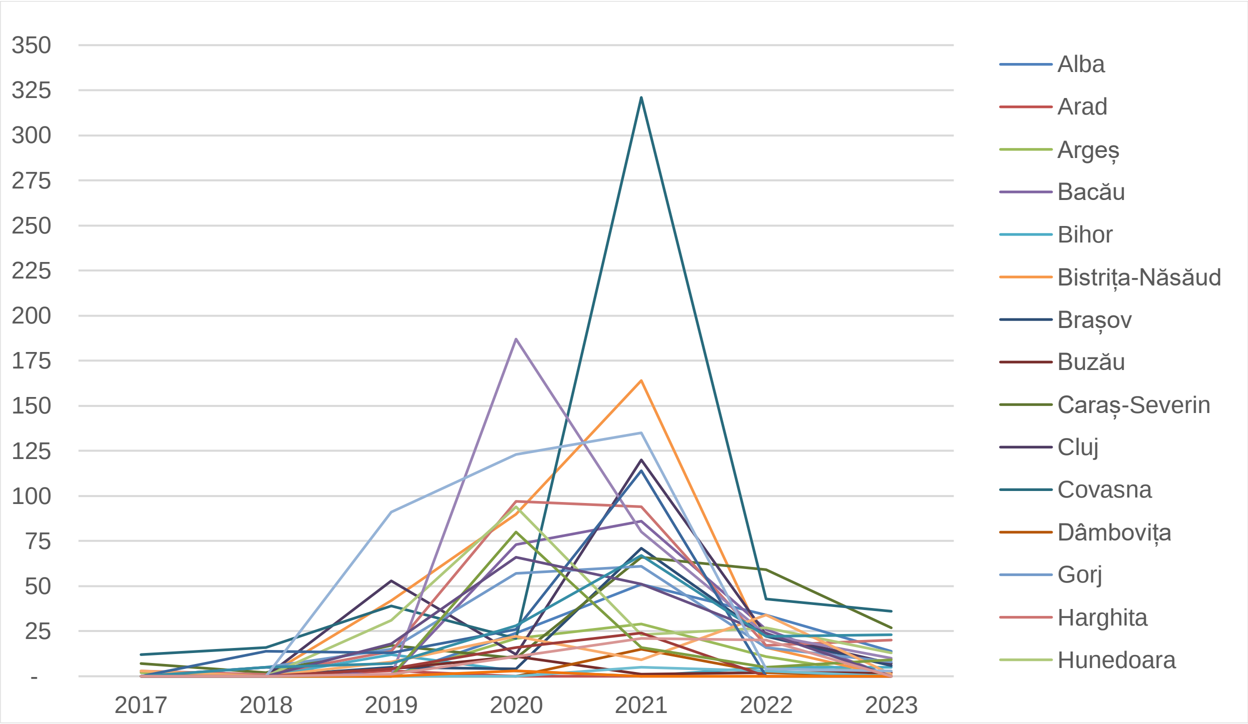


Reference: elaborated using the national registry for the OQT "mountain product" published on ANZM website (consulted in June 2023)

Figure 9 presents the number of product registrations for using the OQT received by ANZM every year since 2017. For the first three years of implementation, the number of registrations was far lower than the number in Italy. However, the number of registrations increased steadily and reached its peak in 2021 (60 times more registrations than in 2017). This peak was followed by a decline in 2022.

The high number of registrations during 2020 and 2021 can be the result of the **information campaigns undertaken by the ANZM mountain development offices**. As in the case of Italy, **a significant part of the producers/processors that are interested in acquiring the right to use the OQT "mountain product" have already opted to join the OQT**. This may explain the steep decrease in the number of registrations in 2022. However, the number of registrations should be closely monitored, to understand the reasons behind the decrease: natural development or other obstacles that producers/processors may face.

Figure 10: Number of product registrations for the OQT “mountain product” received by county by year

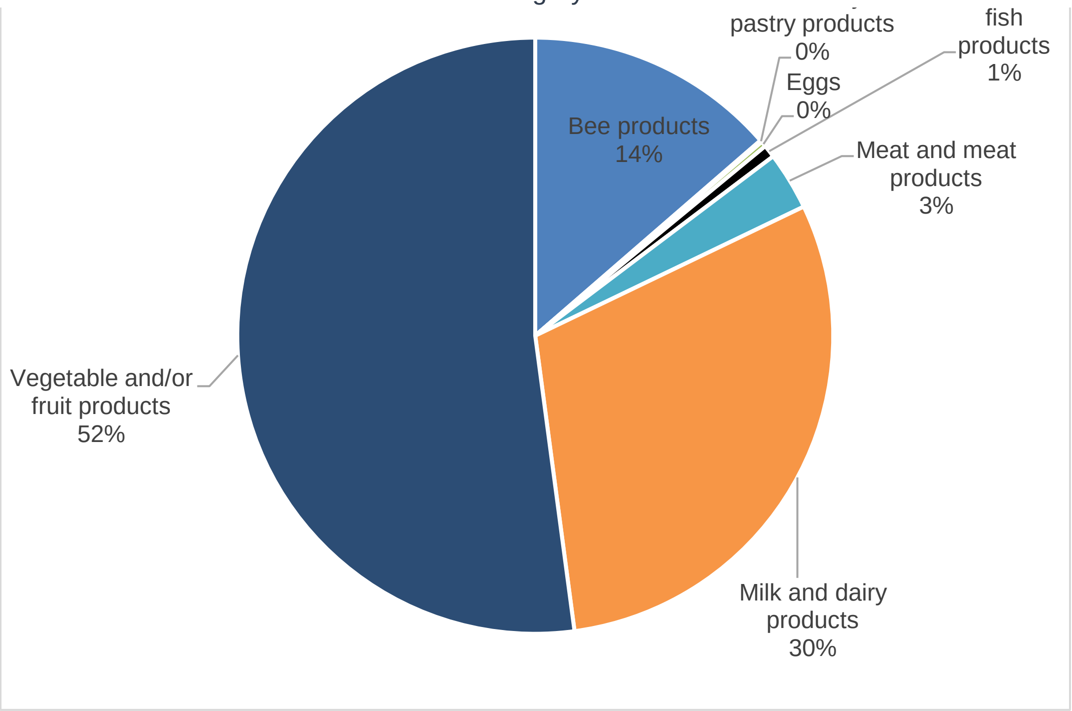


Reference: elaborated using the national registry for the OQT “mountain product” published on ANZM website (consulted in June 2023)

Figure 10 presents the number of product registrations for the OQT “mountain product” recorded in every county since 2017. While the majority of the counties recorded a similar number of registrations, **Covasna County recorded the highest number in 2021**, representing approximately 20% of all registrations.

The **distribution of registrations to use the OQT “mountain product” by product category** shows that vegetable and/or fruit products represent more than half of all registrations (52.10%), followed by milk and dairy products (30.02%), bee products (13.64%), meat and meat products (3.15%), fish and fish products (0.69%), eggs (0.29%) and bread, bakery and pastry products (0.11%). Furthermore, 67% of the registrations are unprocessed products, while only 33% of them are processed.

Figure 11: Distribution of product registrations for the OQT “mountain product” by product category.

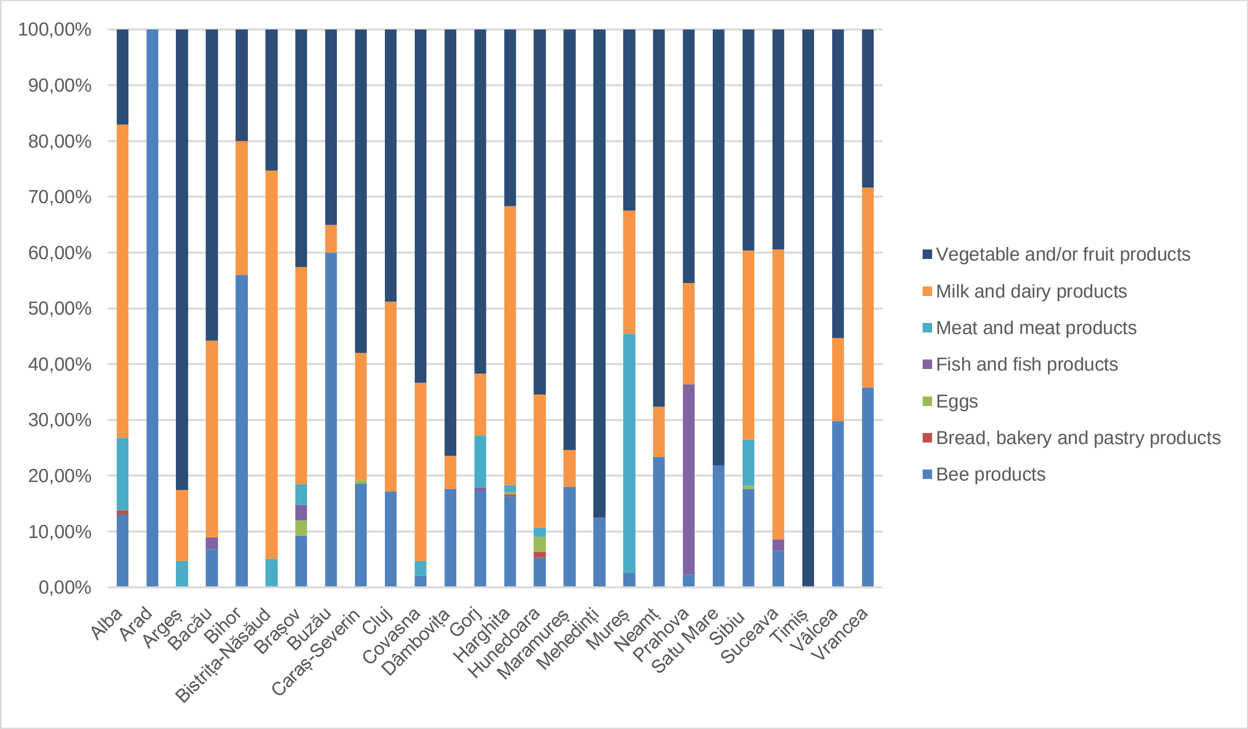


Reference: elaborated using the national registry for the OQT “mountain product” published on ANZM website (consulted in June 2023)

Analysing more in-depth the data available in the National Registry for the OQT “mountain product”, a similar situation with the Italian analysis was identified. Figure 12 highlights two different trends: counties that have a more specialised approach, and counties that have a more diversified approach, in regards to the registration for the OQT “mountain product”. There are counties where the registrations are more specialised in one category. For example, Argeș (83%), Dâmbovița (76%), Mehedinți (88%) and Maramureș (75%) counties are specialised in vegetable and/or fruit products, while Alba (56%), Bistrița-Năsăud (70%) and Suceava (52%) counties are specialised in milk and dairy products. Timiș county has only vegetable and/or fruit products registered as OQT “mountain product”, Arad County has only bee products registered, while Prahova County has a special focus on fish and fish products.

Brașov, Caraș-Severin, Cluj, Harghita and Mureș counties have a more diversified approach, the products registered as “mountain product” being a mix of vegetable and/or fruit products, milk and dairy products and bee products. Mureș county also has a high percentage of meat and meat products (43%).

Figure 12: Distribution (%) of product registrations for the OQT “mountain product” by county & product category.



Reference: elaborated using the national registry for the OQT “mountain product” published on ANZM website (consulted in June 2023)

Tables 5 and 6 provide a detailed breakdown of the number of product registrations recorded in every county for the usage of the OQT “mountain product”, categorised by product type.

Table 5: Distribution of product registrations for the OQT “mountain product” by county and product category (number).

Counties	Bee products	Bread, bakery and pastry products	Eggs	Fish and fish products	Meat and meat products	Milk and dairy products	Vegetable and/or fuit products	Total
Alba	16	1	-	-	16	69	21	123
Arad	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Argeș	-	-	-	-	3	8	52	63
Bacău	13	-	-	4	-	67	106	190
Bihor	14	-	-	-	-	6	5	25
Bistrița-Năsăud	-	-	-	-	16	217	79	312
Brașov	10	-	3	3	4	42	46	108
Buzău	12	-	-	-	-	1	7	20
Caraș-Severin	35	-	1	-	-	43	109	188
Cluj	37	-	-	-	-	73	105	215
Covasna	10	-	-	-	13	156	309	488
Dâmbovița	3	-	-	-	-	1	13	17
Gorj	28	-	-	1	15	18	100	162
Harghita	40	1	1	-	3	123	78	246
Hunedoara	10	2	5	-	3	45	123	188
Maramureș	54	-	-	-	-	20	226	300
Mehedinți	1	-	-	-	-	-	7	8
Mureș	2	-	-	-	33	17	25	77
Neamț	39	-	-	-	-	15	113	167
Prahova	1	-	-	15	-	8	20	44

Counties	Bee products	Bread, bakery and pastry products	Eggs	Fish and fish products	Meat and meat products	Milk and dairy products	Vegetable and/or fuit products	Total
Satu Mare	24	-	-	-	-	-	86	110
Sibiu	28	-	1	-	13	54	63	159
Suceava	10	-	-	3	-	79	60	152
Timiș	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Vâlcea	106	-	-	-	-	53	197	356
Vrancea	19	-	-	-	-	19	15	53
Total	515	4	11	26	119	1,134	1,968	3,777

Reference: elaborated using the national registry for the OQT "mountain product" published on ANZM website (consulted in June 2023).

Table 6: Distribution of product registrations for the OQT "mountain product" by county and product category (%).

Counties	Bee products	Bread, bakery and pastry products	Eggs	Fish and fish products	Meat and meat products	Milk and dairy products	Vegetable and/or fruit products
Alba	13.01%	0.81%	0.00%	0.00%	13.01%	56.10%	17.07%
Arad	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Argeș	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.76%	12.70%	82.54%
Bacău	6.84%	0.00%	0.00%	2.11%	0.00%	35.26%	55.79%
Bihor	56.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	24.00%	20.00%
Bistrița-Năsăud	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	5.13%	69.55%	25.32%
Brașov	9.26%	0.00%	2.78%	2.78%	3.70%	38.89%	42.59%
Buzău	60.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	5.00%	35.00%
Caraș-Severin	18.62%	0.00%	0.53%	0.00%	0.00%	22.87%	57.98%

Counties	Bee products	Bread, bakery and pastry products	Eggs	Fish and fish products	Meat and meat products	Milk and dairy products	Vegetable and/or fruit products
Cluj	17.21%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	33.95%	48.84%
Covasna	2.05%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.66%	31.97%	63.32%
Dâmbovița	17.65%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	5.88%	76.47%
Gorj	17.28%	0.00%	0.00%	0.62%	9.26%	11.11%	61.73%
Harghita	16.26%	0.41%	0.41%	0.00%	1.22%	50.00%	31.71%
Hunedoara	5.32%	1.06%	2.66%	0.00%	1.60%	23.94%	65.43%
Maramureș	18.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	6.67%	75.33%
Mehedinți	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	87.50%
Mureș	2.60%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	42.86%	22.08%	32.47%
Neamț	23.35%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	8.98%	67.66%
Prahova	2.27%	0.00%	0.00%	34.09%	0.00%	18.18%	45.45%
Satu Mare	21.82%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	78.18%
Sibiu	17.61%	0.00%	0.63%	0.00%	8.18%	33.96%	39.62%
Suceava	6.58%	0.00%	0.00%	1.97%	0.00%	51.97%	39.47%
Timiș	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Vâlcea	29.78%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	14.89%	55.34%
Vrancea	35.85%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	35.85%	28.30%
Total	13.64%	0.11%	0.29%	0.69%	3.15%	30.02%	52.10%

Reference: elaborated using the national registry for the OQT “mountain product” published on ANZM website (consulted in June 2023).

3. Analysis of survey results

In line with the methodology outlined earlier, this section provides an overview of the primary findings derived from both the surveys conducted among producers and regional administrations. Given the higher statistical significance of the producer survey compared with the regional survey, the analysis will primarily focus on this dataset. However, thematic insights drawn from the information obtained from the regional administrations will also be incorporated to complement the findings.

As anticipated, the 210 replies collected thought the producers' survey are mainly from Italy (150) and Romania (57), with only 3 replies from France.

Table 7: Number of replies collected from producers by country.

Country	Number of replies
Italy	150
Romania	57
France	3
Total	**210**

For more details on the **geographical distribution** of the replies, the following tables 8 and 9 show how they are distributed by region in Italy and Romania.

Table 8: Number of replies collected from Italian producers by region.

Region	Replies
Abruzzo	4
Basilicata	5
Calabria	2
Emilia Romagna	22
Friuli Venezia Giulia	7
Liguria	3
Lombardia	15
Marche	1
Piemonte	58
Sardegna	3
Sicilia	1
Toscana	8
Trento	4
Valle D'Aosta	7
Veneto	10

Figure 13: Number of replies collected from Italian producers by region (decreasing order).

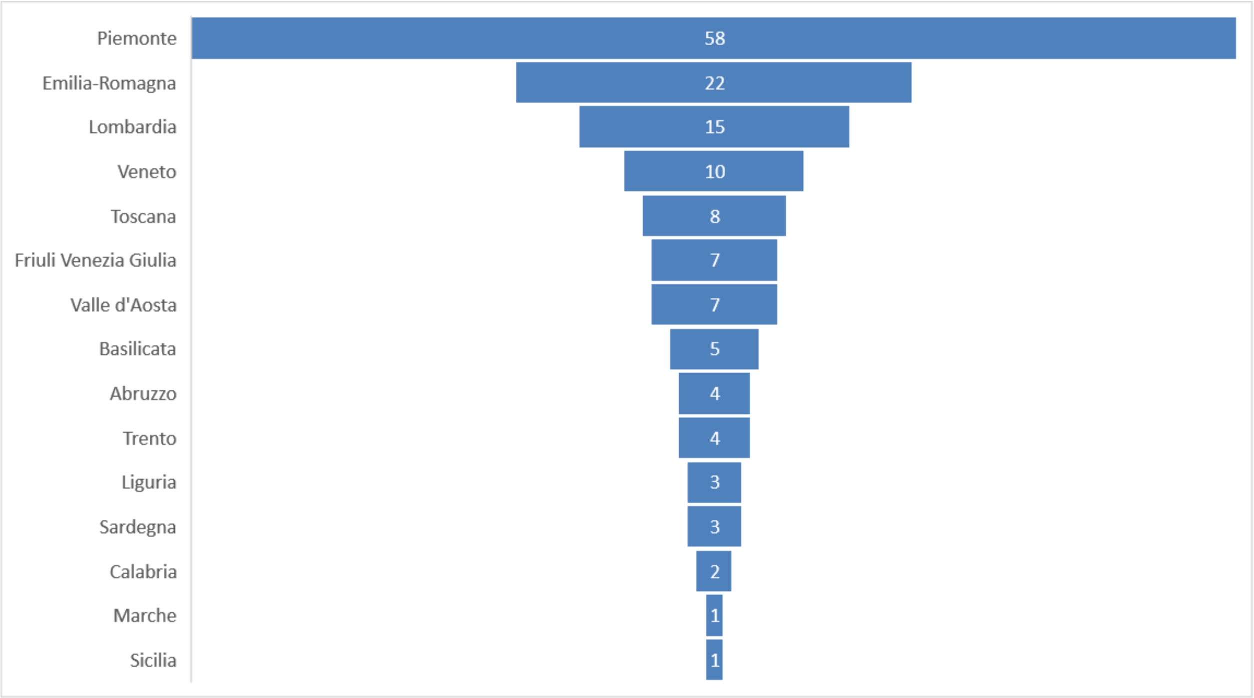


Table 9: Number of replies collected from Romanian producers by region.

Region	Replies
Nord-Vest	12
Nord-Est	11
Sud-Vest Oltenia	11
Sud-Est	0
Sud-Muntenia	2
Vest	3
Centru	18
București	0

3.1. Data on registered users

Section B "Data of Registered Users" collects information from producers or businesses that have registered to use the Optional Quality Term "mountain product".[17] It includes details such as the name and website of the farm or business, the type of production (primary, on-farm processing, or off-farm processing), the number of animals or hectares of arable land dedicated to OQT products, and the number of employees for processing companies. Additionally, respondents are asked to specify the product categories they produce and whether they adhere to other quality schemes.

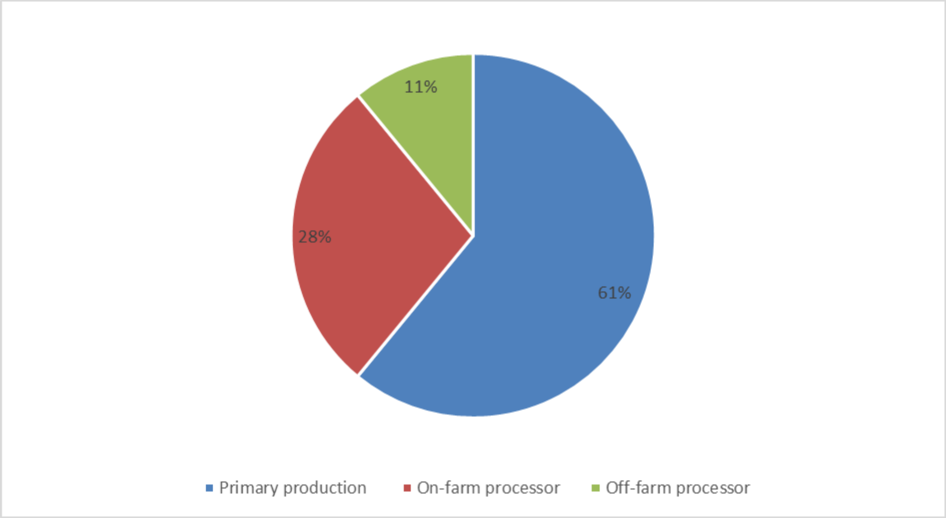
3.1.1. Insight from respondents' data

The majority of the respondents are **primary producers** (61%), followed by on-farm processors (28%) and off-farm processors (11%).

Table 10: Distribution of respondents per type of production.

Type of production	N of respondents	%
Primary production	128	61%
On-farm processor	59	28%
Off-farm processor	23	11%

Figure 14: Distribution of respondents per type of production (%).



[17] The survey data have been anonymised so that personal identification will not be possible.

Table 11 shows producers' distribution per type of production, based on the country of origin. In Italy, 55% of respondents are engaged in primary production, while 33% are on-farm processors and 12% are off-farm processors. In Romania, a higher percentage of respondents, 77%, are involved in primary production, with 18% as on-farm processors and 5% as off-farm processors.

Table 11: Distribution of respondents per type of production and by country.

	Italy		Romania		France
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**
Primary production	83	55%	44	77%	1
On-farm processor	49	33%	10	18%	-
Off-farm processor	18	12%	3	5%	2

The primary producers who replied to the survey represent a total of 4.720 beehives for honey production and a total of 25.440 animals bred (table 9). Furthermore, the respondents' agricultural activities cover around 7.623 hectares of UAA (table 10).

Table 12: Number of animals bred.

	Italy	Romania	France	Total
Beehives	3750	815	155	4720
Others	24516	924	-	25440

Table 13: Hectares of UAA.

	Hectares of UAA
Italy	7307.2
Romania	297.59
France	18
Total	7622.79

The processing companies who replied to the survey (82) give work to a total of 248 employees.

Table 14: Total number of processing farms and employees in processing companies per country.

	Italy	Romania	France	Total
Number of employees in processing companies	164	39	45	**248**
Number of processing farms	67	13	2	**82**

Concerning the **product categories** covered, the most represented is fruit, vegetable and cereal, fresh or processed (34%), followed by honey and other bee products (23%) and milk, cheeses and other dairy products (22%).

Table 15: Distribution of respondents per product category by country.

Product category	Italy	Romania	France	Total
Fresh meat and meat products	8	1	1	10
Milk, cheeses and other dairy products	32	14	1	47
Other products of animal origin	3	2	-	5
Fruit, vegetables and cereal, fresh or processed	52	20	-	72
Honey and other bee products	32	15	1	48
Bread, pastry, cakes, confectionery, biscuits and other bakery products	2	-	-	2
Fresh fish and fish products	0	2	0	2
Other	21	3	0	24

Figure 15: Distribution of respondents per product category (%).

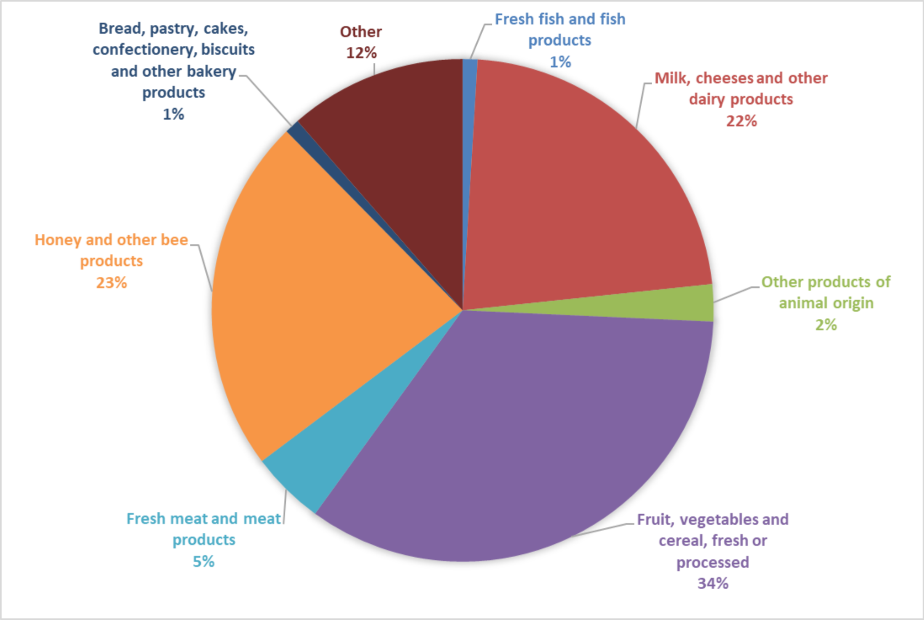
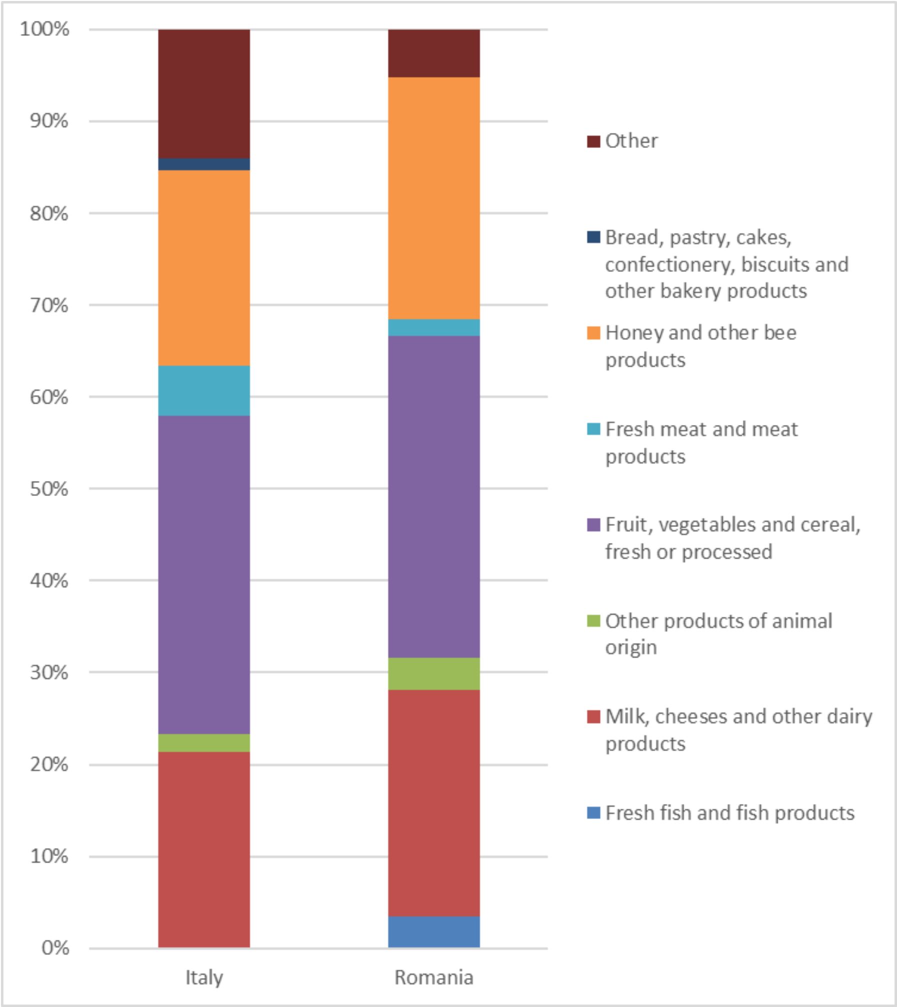


Figure 16: Distribution of respondents per product category by country.



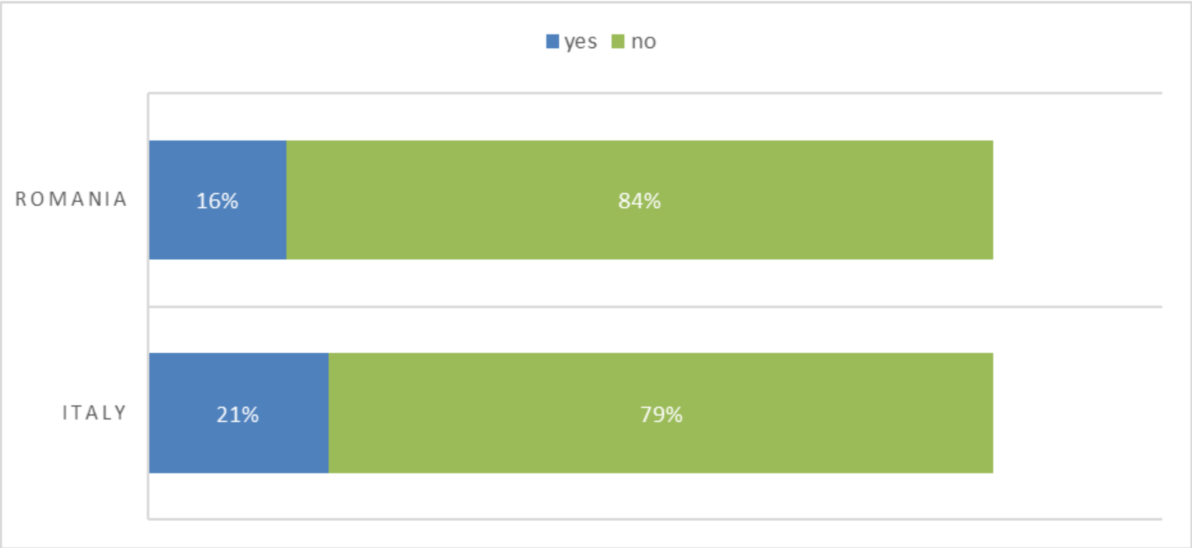
3.1.2. Adhesion to other quality schemes

The survey (questions B8 to B10) also tried to analyse if the OQT is used as a standalone quality term or together with other quality schemes and certifications. The table below shows that only a minority of respondents (22%) adhere as well to other quality schemes and there are no significant differences across countries (see figure 17).

Table 16: Adhesion to other quality schemes.

Adhesion to other quality schemes	Italy	Romania	France	Total
Yes	32	11	2	45
No	118	46	1	165

Figure 17: Adhesion to other quality schemes by country.



Among the **Italian producers** that confirmed their adhesion to multiple quality schemes, the most used are geographical indications with 17 PDOs and 10 PGIs, followed by organic certification (10).

Among companies using the OQT and a GI, 8 use both quality schemes on the same product, hence the PDO or PGI logo appear together with the OQT logo[18]. On the other hand, 9 companies replied that they adhere to the PDO/PGI scheme in compliance with the product specifications governing mountain products and use the OQT for non-PDO/PGI products.

For the remaining, 2 are traditional agri-food products (PAT) which means they are products included in a special list, established by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy (MASAF) with the cooperation of the Regions[19].

[18] It's pertinent to refer to the "logo" rather than merely the "term" in the Italian context where a distinct logo associated with the Optional Quality Term “mountain product” has been created.

[19] A product can be registered in the list if its “*processing, preservation and seasoning methods have been consolidated over time and are practised on their territory in a homogeneous manner and according to traditional rules for a period of not less than twenty-five years*”. Regions identify these 'traditional' agri-food products and share their list annually with the Ministry for Agricultural Policies for national publication. Inclusion in the list doesn't grant rights, and any reference to the geographical name doesn't imply origin recognition. Nevertheless, after publication, the product's name or synonyms cannot be deposited or registered, aligning with current Community and national laws on intellectual and industrial property (click here for more information).

To conclude, two producers declared they use the OQT in combination with a collective brand[20], two with a national quality scheme on integrated agriculture[21] and one applies a private code of practices defined by a producer organisation[22].

Table 17: Distribution of Italian respondents who adhere to other quality schemes.

Other quality schemes	Italy
PDO	17
PGI	10
Organic	6
Collective brand	2
Traditional agri-food product	2
National quality scheme	2

The total number of adhesions per quality scheme is higher than the positive replies to the previous question because some producers adhere to several schemes (for instance there are companies producing different PDOs or having both a GI and organic certification).

Among **Romanian producers** confirming their adhesion to multiple quality schemes, the most used are *Traditional product*[23] (2), a national system to certify traditional products, and Szekely product[24] (2). The other mentioned systems are a regional brand from Transilvania (*Authentica Transilvania*)[25], organic agriculture and food safety certifications (ISO 22000 and HACCP).

Finally, among the 3 **French producers** who replied to the survey, 2 declared using multiple quality schemes: one adheres to organic certification system while the other produces two PGI products, using both PGI logo and the OQT.

[20] "Io sono FVG": https://www.iosonofvg.it/home; "Tradizioni e sapori di Modena": https://www.tradizionesaporimodena.it/
[21] Integrated Crop Management National Quality System and National Quality System for Animal Husbandry (Italy).
[22] https://www.carnidisicilia.it/
[23] RO: *Produs traditional*: https://www.madr.ro/industrie-alimentara/produse-traditionale-romanesti.html
[24] RO: *Produs secuiesc* is a public, regional brand, owned and coordinated by Harghita County Council, and applied only to food products from the Szekely Land https://www.facebook.com/szekelytermek.ro/
[25] Regional private brand (owned by Environmental Partnership Foundation) applied to Transylvania region.

3.1.3. Value of production under the OQT "mountain product"

Question B11 seek to gather information about the approximate value, in thousands of euros, of the products produced by the respondent's company that adhere to the OQT "mountain product". Respondents were asked to provide this information by indicating a range of values, specifying the lower and upper bounds in thousands of euros.

The tables below shows that the **largest majority of producers (84%)** declared that the **approximate value of their products** complying with the OQT "Mountain Product" is up to **50.000€**[26].

Around 5% of the producers who replied to this question fall in the range between 50 and 100 thousand euros, while only 1% belong to the range between 150 and 200 thousand euros.

Finally, around 10% replied that the approximate value of their products complying with the OQT "Mountain Product" is more than 200.000€.

There is no significant difference between replies from Italian and Romanian producers. While the percentage from French producers are not representative, due to low number of replies.

When looking more in detail to the distribution of producers under 100 thousand euros, around 53% of the total respondents to this question declared that the approximate value of their products complying with the OQT "Mountain Product" is up to 10.000€ and another 18% between 10 and 20 thousand euros.

Table 18: Farm incomes from the OQT in thousands € (N and %).

	Italy		Romania		France	Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	N	%
0-50.000	**100**	**85%**	**31**	**84%**	**1**	**132**	**84%**
50.000-100.000	**5**	**4%**	**3**	**8%**	**-**	**8**	**5%**
100.000-150.000	1	1%	-		-	1	1%
150.000-200.000	0	0%	-		-	-	-
>200.000	11	9%	3	8%	2	16	10%

[26] This question was voluntary so not all producers replied (157 replies out of 210). The percentage are calculated on the total respondents to this question (and not on the total number of replies collected by the survey).

Table 19: Number of respondents with OQT production value <100.000€.

Number of farms with OQT production value <100.000€	Italy		Romania		France	Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	N	%
0-10.000	**62**	**47%**	**21**	**57%**	**-**	**83**	**53%**
10.000-20.000	23	17%	5	14%	1	29	18%
20.000-30.000	8	6%	2	5%	-	10	6%
30.000-40.000	3	2%	2	5%	-	5	3%
40.000-50.000	4	3%	1	3%	-	5	3%
50.000-60.000	2	2%	1	3%	-	3	2%
60.000-70.000	-	0%	-	0%	-	-	0%
70.000-80.000	1	1%	1	3%	-	2	1%
80.000-90.000	2	2%	-	0%	-	2	1%
90.000-100.000	-	-	1	3%	-	1	1%

In summary, the data suggests that the majority of producers adhering to the OQT "mountain product" operate within **smaller or medium-scale production ranges**, with a relatively limited number of high-value producers. This highlights the predominant participation of small producers in the OQT.

3.1.4. Percentage of production using the OQT "mountain product"

Question B12 seeks to gather information regarding the proportion of a respondent's production that adheres to the OQT "mountain product". Participants were asked to indicate the percentage of their total production that falls under the criteria specified by the OQT. This question aims to assess the extent to which producers allocate their production to meet the requirements of the OQT, providing insights into the level of adoption and integration of the label within their production processes.

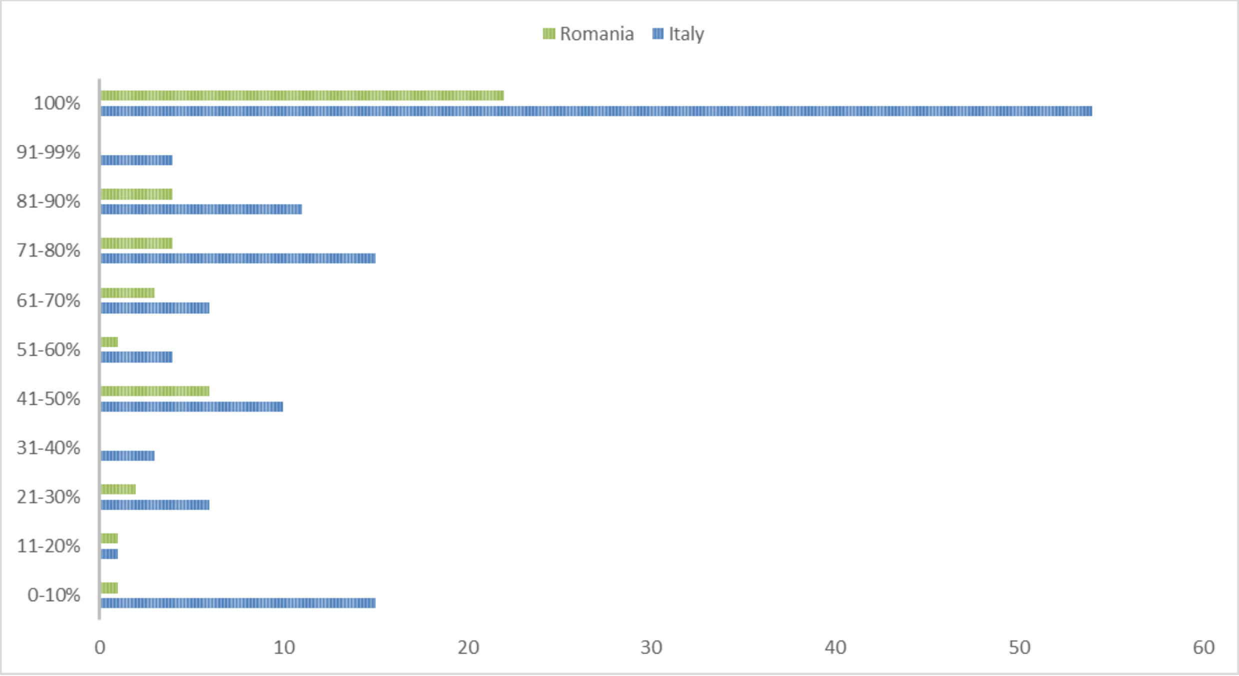
The table below shows that the **majority of producers (44%) declared that they use the OQT "mountain product" for the totality of their production**[27].

[27] This question was voluntary so not all producers replied (176 replies out of 210). The percentage are calculated on the total respondents to this question (and not on the total number of replies collected by the survey).

Table 20: Distribution of respondents by percentage of production using the OQT (by country).

Percentage of production using the OQT	Italy	Romania	France	Total	%
0-10%	15	1	-	16	9%
11-20%	1	1	-	2	1%
21-30%	6	2	1	9	5%
31-40%	3	-	-	3	2%
41-50%	10	6	-	16	9%
51-60%	4	1	-	5	3%
61-70%	6	3	-	9	5%
71-80%	15	4	-	19	11%
81-90%	11	4	1	16	9%
91-99%	4	-	-	4	2%
100%	**54**	**22**	**1**	**77**	**44%**

Figure 18: Distribution of respondents by percentage of production using the OQT (by country).



3.2. Knowledge of the OQT mountain product

Section C "Knowledge of the OQT mountain product" aims to gather information on how respondents learned about the existence of the OQT, what motivated them to join the scheme, and any other relevant details regarding their understanding and awareness of the OQT "mountain product".

3.2.1. Understanding how producers learned about the OQT "mountain product"

Question C1 aims to ascertain the various channels through which respondents became aware of the existence of the OQT "mountain product". Participants were provided with multiple options and asked to select all applicable methods through which they acquired knowledge about the OQT. This question enables an understanding of the effectiveness of different communication channels in disseminating information about the OQT "mountain product" among producers.

The table below shows that the majority of producers learned about the existence of the optional quality term on internet or consulting newspapers and magazines (33%) and thanks to the word of mouth between operators (30%). Participation in conferences organised by producer associations and by public administration represent respectively 20 and 21% of replies.

Table 21: How respondents learnt about the existence of the OQT "mountain product" (%).

	Italy	Romania	Total[28]
Participation in conferences organised by privates/ producer associations	21%	18%	20%
Participation in events organised by public administrations	18%	30%	21%
Internet - newspaper - magazines	36%	26%	33%
Word of mouth between operators	26%	40%	30%

A slight difference can be noticed when looking at Romanian replies: in this case word of mouth is the first channel of information (40%) followed by participation in events organised by public administrations (30%).

For this question producers could also indicate others channels or ways in which they got to know about the OQT.

In Italy it seems important the informative role and action of professional associations towards their members (8 replies). Furthermore, in two cases the producers were informed by a regional

[28] It does not make statistically sense to show French results in % separately, but they are counted in the total.

development agency (2 replies). Other replies mention getting information from a cooperative; international fairs; studies; professional knowledge; and participation in rural development programmes calls.

In Romania, two producers got the information from local representatives while another got to know the OQT participating in a Local Action Group (LAG) initiative.

Finally, one producer in France has followed the process from the beginning, first using the French label and getting information from Euromontana on the EU OQT “mountain product”.

3.2.2. Motivation to join the OQT “mountain product”

Question C2 seeks to explore the motivations behind producers' decisions to join the OQT “mountain product”. Respondents were presented with several potential reasons and asked to select all that apply to them. This question helps to elucidate the diverse incentives driving producers to participate in the OQT scheme, providing insights into their objectives and priorities.

Concerning the **motivations to join the scheme**, the vast majority of producers (72%) replied they chose to adhere to the OQT in order to increase the **visibility** of their products on the market, 22% was interested in the possibility to access to support and funding of the rural development programmes (RDPs) and 21% in increasing the profit margins of the company.

Table 22: Motivation to join the scheme (% of respondents).

	Italy	Romania	Total[29]
Increased visibility of products on the market	71%	72%	72%
Increasing company profit margins	18%	28%	21%
Access to the support and funding of the rural development programmes	19%	33%	22%

Among other reasons to join the scheme, producers highlighted the importance of the OQT in terms of valorisation and recognition of product quality, as well as the guarantee for consumer of a higher quality connected with the origin from mountain area. One producer even shared his objective, more at territorial level than company level: to increase the economic benefit for the local supply chain in mountain area.

3.3. Access to the scheme

The Section "Access to the scheme" focuses on gathering information about the process of joining the OQT "mountain product". It includes questions about any additional costs incurred by participants, the target market for their products, whether they have undergone inspections by

[29] It does not make sense to show French results separately, but they are counted in the total.

authorities, and whether they have received support or assistance from public administrations in joining the scheme.

3.3.1. Costs of joining the OQT "mountain product"

Question D1 aims to ascertain whether joining the OQT "mountain product" has led to increased costs for the respondents. If respondents answered positively, indicating that joining the scheme has indeed resulted in higher costs, they were prompted to specify the types of costs they have incurred in question D2. This two-part question helps to assess the financial implications of participating in the OQT scheme for producers, providing insights into the specific areas where additional costs may arise.

The **vast majority of respondents (85%) affirmed that the adhesion to the OQT did not entail higher costs for them**. In fact, this is in line with the analysis of the implementation at national level, which highlighted that the registration process (Italy and Romania) and the use of the OQT are free of charge in all three countries.

Table 23: Higher costs associated with the adhesion to the OQT.

	Italy		Romania		France	Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	N	%
Yes	22	15%	8	14%	1	31	15%
No	128	85%	49	86%	2	179	85%

The producers that reported higher costs (15% of respondents to the survey) mainly claimed it was due to administrative costs (17 replies), to controls (11), to adaptation of the production process to respect the OQT specifications (10), to costs related to changing the label for including the OQT (4), and to adaption of the company structure (2).

Table 24: Categories of additional costs indicated by respondent who faced higher costs due to the adhesion to the OQT.

Categories of costs	Italy	Romania	France	Total
Administrative	11	5	1	17
Controls	7	3	1	11
Adaptation of company structures	2	-	-	2
Adaptation of production processes	6	4	-	10

3.3.2. Target market for products under the OQT "mountain product"

Question D3 aimed to explore the main target market of producers using the OQT "mountain product". Respondents could select more than one option and also indicate other target markets, different from those proposed in the list.

Table 25: Target market for products under the OQT "mountain product" (N and %)[30].

	Italy		Romania		France	Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	N	%
Local	118	79%	38	67%	1	157	75%
Company shop	55	37%	11	19%	-	66	31%
Retailers	47	31%	24	42%	1	72	34%

The majority of producers (75%) identified the **local market** as their main target, followed by retailers (34%) and company shop (31%).

Other options include the Horeca sector, specialties shops and e-commerce, direct selling, wholesale market and exports.

3.3.3. Controls by the relevant authorities

Question D4 seeks to determine whether respondents have undergone control procedures conducted by the relevant authorities regarding their adherence to the OQT "mountain product". This question helps to gauge the extent of regulatory oversight and compliance monitoring within the framework of the OQT scheme, providing insights into the frequency and scope of control activities implemented by authorities to ensure adherence to quality standards.

Around 44% of respondents declared having been **controlled** by the relevant authorities. The percentage of controls is higher for Romania where 65% of respondents declared they had been controlled, while for Italy and France the percentage is respectively 36% and 33%.

Table 26: Respondents controlled by competent authorities (N and %).

	Italy		Romania		France	Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	N	%
Yes	54	36%	37	65%	1	92	44%
No	96	64%	20	35%	2	118	56%

[30] It's important to note that respondents were allowed to select multiple options, resulting in a cumulative percentage exceeding 100%. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of responses to the survey, ensuring that each option represents the percentage of respondents who chose it.

3.3.4. Support and assistance from public administrations

Question D5 and D6 aims to ascertain whether respondents have received support or assistance from public administrations, including regions, provinces, or other public bodies, in joining the OQT "mountain product". These questions help assess the extent to which public authorities are involved in facilitating the integration of producers into the OQT scheme by providing various forms of support, such as financial assistance, guidance, or administrative services.

Only **24%** of respondents declared having received **support or assistance** from public administrations in joining the scheme. The percentage is higher among Romanian producers (39%) than Italian ones (19%).

Table 27: Respondents who received support from public administrations (N and %).

	Italy		Romania		France	Total	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**N**	**%**
Yes	28	19%	22	39%	1	51	24%
No	122	81%	35	61%	2	159	76%

When asked to specify what kind of assistance, producers replied they received clarifications concerning the requirements to be met for joining the schemes (31 replies), support in retrieving and filling the forms (30 replies) and financial support for the promotion of the OQT "mountain product" (5 replies).

Finally, an Italian producer mentioned being involved in the Interreg Project TopValue on the OQT "mountain product" (see Box 1 below for more information on the project).

Box 1: Interreg project Top Value - "The added value of mountain products: how to measure and communicate it”.

TOP-Value was a 3-year EU **Interreg** co-funded project that started in January **2017** and ended in December **2019**. It aimed to **encourage producers to adhere to the OQT "mountain product"** in the cross-border area between Italy and Austria. The project covered 3 regions in this area: Austria - **Carinthia**; Italy - **Friuli Venezia Giulia and Veneto**.

Specific objectives:

- guaranteeing the continuity of production activities in the mountains;
- increasing the profitability of agricultural enterprises in the project area;
- strengthening sustainable cross-border gastronomic tourism;
- safeguarding the peculiarities of local communities and protecting territorial "diversity" threatened by the standardisation of production.

At the beginning of the project, the OQT did not have yet a wide adherence in the cross-border area between Italy and Austria. TOP-Value aimed at encouraging mountain producers’ adhesion to the OQT, as a tool to increase the added value of mountain agro-food production; to give more information to consumers; to strengthen territorial competitiveness and increase local income while protecting local productions and preserving the natural environment and landscape.

The innovative approach of the TOP-Value project is based on the possibility of strengthening the valorisation of mountain products adding to OQT a series of **information regarding the ecosystem services** they provide. In particular, the project activities focused on the definition of protocols to quantifying, through specific indicators, the following ecosystem services provided by the mountain supply chains:

- plant and landscape biodiversity;
- protection of animal welfare;
- environmental and social sustainability and reduction of CO_2 emissions.

Identifying and measuring these aspects of mountain productions makes it possible to meet the expectations of consumers and tourists by adopting effective communication approaches for the promotion of traditional local products that keep the cross-border area alive and attractive.

Through various case studies, the project also envisaged to highlight the **criticalities** connected with the adoption of the **OQT “mountain product” and provide useful solutions and ad hoc tools for producers**, to respond quickly to the concrete needs of the sector,

- **A consumer guide on quality schemes:** *“Logos, Labels, Quality...A guide to the finer points of the schemes”* **EN**, **IT**, **DE**;
- **An e-learning course** for producers on different agri-food quality systems;

- **Guidelines for a methodological and organisational procedure** aimed at helping mountain dairies using the OQT "mountain product" in managing milk supply traceability, in compliance with EU Regulation;
- Scientific reports describing the protocols followed for data collection and processing and summarising the results obtained through the study of each ecosystem service;
- **Report** assessing the **consumer's awareness and willingness to pay** for "mountain products" and the **economic impact on dairy farms** following the adoption of the OQT.

Table 28: Regional information and promotion activities to support producers' uptake.

Region	Information and promotional material	Public meetings / fair
Emilia-Romagna	Page of Regional website dedicated to the OQT "mountain product" with explanations on the role of the Region and on the procedure. For more information see the promotional **video** and **brochure**	Meetings with companies and local administrators to present the OQT and explain how to use it. Mountain producers were invited to present the OQT on the regional stand at the SANA food fair.
Piemonte	Page of Regional website dedicated to the OQT "mountain product" with explanations on the procedure for adhesion.	
Veneto	Page of Regional website dedicated to the OQT "mountain product" with explanations on the procedure for adhesion.	
Toscana	Page of Regional website dedicated to the OQT "mountain product" with explanations on the procedure for adhesion.	**BuyFood Toscana**: An event to promote international knowledge of the excellent agri-food products of the Tuscany region, such as PDO and PGI, Agriquality, certified organic production, OQT "mountain products", through activities involving companies, protection consortia and product promotion associations.
Lombardia	Page of Regional website dedicated to the OQT "mountain product" with explanations on the procedure for adhesion. For more information: Informative brochure (IT, EN)	
Friuli Venezia Giulia	Page of Regional website dedicated to the OQT "mountain product" with explanations on the procedure for adhesion.	

3.3.5. Financial support under rural development measures

Question D7 seeks to gather information about whether respondents who have received financial support did so under the framework of rural development support measures. This question helps to assess the extent to which rural development programs are used to provide financial assistance to producers participating in the OQT "mountain product".

As pointed out by the previous questions, only 5 producers received financial support from public administrations. Nevertheless, when asked to specify if it was under the framework of the rural development, no relevant information on the specific support measures was shared. The feedback shared by producers in the evaluation section, as well as the replies received by regional administrations seem to indicate that **the existing rural development measures dedicated to support of quality schemes failed to address the needs of OQT producers in terms of financial support**. At the moment there is no specific measure capable to target this sector.

Box 2: AREPO survey on measure 3 CAP 2014-2020 (realised in 2016).

In 2016, AREPO realised a survey to analyse the implementation of measure 3 on quality schemes in the Rural Development Programmes of its member Regions during the CAP programming period 2014-2020.

Measure 3 was divided in two sub-measures:

1. **Sub-measure 3.1 provided support for certification costs related to quality schemes**, including organic, geographical indications, the OQT "mountain product" and national quality schemes. This measure aimed to alleviate the financial burden on producers associated with obtaining and maintaining certification for their agricultural products, thereby promoting adherence to quality schemes and enhancing the competitiveness of rural areas.
2. **Sub-measure 3.2 provided financial support for promotional activities** related to agricultural products, **implemented by groups of producers in the internal market**, concerning products covered by a quality scheme receiving support in accordance with sub-measure 3.1.

Among the respondents, 15 regions activated measure 3[31]. The results highlighted several shortcomings in the implementation of the two sub-measures:

Sub-measure 3.1 on support for certification costs

- **Eligibility criterion - new participation to a quality scheme**: due to the inclusion of this criterion, a producer in order to be eligible for this support needed to apply for the

[31] On that occasion, 19 regions answered to the survey, from 5 different Member States (France (8), Germany (1), Italy (6), Poland (1), and Spain (3)).

aid before his adhesion to a quality scheme. As a consequence, very few farmers could benefit from this measure. A lot of producers who adhered to a quality system before the entry into force of the rural development programmes (2014-2020) have been excluded.

- **Disproportionate administrative burdens for small amounts of aid** both for managing authorities and for beneficiaries.

In December 2017, the so-called Omnibus Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2017/2393) entered into force in order to simplify the CAP. It introduced an amendment enlarging the definition of new participation to farmers or groups of farmers who adhered in a quality scheme in the five preceding years. Even if the intention to include producers who has been previously excluded was positive and clear, the five years rules introduced even more administrative burden for the managing authorities.

Sub-measure 3.2 on Promotion

The main problem identified with sub-measure 3.2 on promotion of agricultural products under a quality scheme was its coupling with measure 3.1. This meant that only quality schemes receiving support in accordance with measure 3.1 were considered potential beneficiaries for 3.2.

As a consequence, **the OQT "mountain product" was *de facto* excluded from measure 3.2.** In fact, the OQT is not covered by a certification and as such cannot receive support under measure 3.1 for certification costs.

Nevertheless, 6 regions (out of 15 that replied to the survey) declared having included the OQT among the quality schemes benefitting from the measure[32].

In conclusion, the results showed that the **level of existing aid was minimal for all quality schemes**, particularly for measure 3.1 on certification, and usually resulted in disproportionate administrative costs that overcome benefits for producers. Several regions declared that they did not open the measure precisely due to these high administrative costs and due to the lack of new producers.

To further explore this topic and complete the information collected by AREPO in 2016, MOVING survey for regional administrations on the implementation of the OQT comprised a series of questions about the inclusion and effectiveness of support measures for the OQT "mountain product" in regional RDPs under the 2014-2020 CAP programming period, including details on the type of measures implemented, the number of benefiting producers, and the allocated budget.

[32] The information on the OQT collected in 2016 survey will be integrated in the analysis below concerning the result of MOVING survey on the optional quality term "mountain product".

Additionally, respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures during the previous programming period.

Out of 12 replies collected, only **4 regions declared having included the OQT "mountain product" among the beneficiaries of support measures for quality schemes under the previous CAP programming period (2014-2020) and the current one**: Friuli Venezia Giulia, Piemonte and Valle d'Aosta (Italy) and Occitanie (France).

Concerning the previous programming period (2014-2020), these regions declared having activated the sub-measure 3.1 (see box 2 for more information).

The activation of measure 3.1 for the support for certification costs, may seem incoherent with the OQT characteristics, since the scheme does not have a certification. On that issue, the same Italian regions (Piemonte, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Valle d'Aosta), on occasion of a previous survey realised by AREPO in 2016 (see box 2), explained that they were able to include the OQT as beneficiary of measure 3.1, under the condition that it would have been eligible only in case a certification system was activated.

In fact, in 2013 when the RDPs were approved it was still under discussion in Italy the possibility to strengthen the OQT at national level with a certification. Nevertheless, that was not the case and the sub-measure 3.1 remained *de facto* unused.

The situation is not so different for **sub-measure 3.2**, which was perceived as equally ineffective in supporting the OQT "mountain product". In Occitanie and Valle d'Aosta no producers using the OQT benefited from this sub-measure, while Friuli Venezia Giulia does not have any specific data on this category of producers.

One of the main reasons for this lack of applications from OQT "mountain product" operators is the absence of collective governance among these producers. In fact, the potential beneficiaries of this sub-measure are groups of producers, not single producers (see box 2). As a consequence, **the absence of associations or groups of producers using the OQT "mountain product" makes it impossible for them to access these funding**.

To overcome these shortcomings, Piemonte has decided to **support** the OQT "mountain product" in its regional rural development programme **indirectly**, **assigning priority scores to operators using the OQT while applying for aid under other RDP measures**. This strategy was perceived as effective by the administrators, since producers using the OQT "mountain product" have actually been advantaged in rankings to access funding of some RDP measures. Nevertheless, there is no specific data to quantify how many operators using the OQT "mountain product" have benefited from these priority scores. Furthermore, the regional administration did not perceive a real impact in term of increasing producers' awareness, nor consumers' knowledge concerning the OQT "mountain product".

Concerning the current CAP programming period, the same 4 regions expressed concerns since the shortcomings and limitations of previous measure 3 (both 3.1 and 3.2) have not been addressed.

The whole structure of the CAP has changed and the rural development measures have been included in the national CAP strategic plans and relative regional annexes, in case of Member States with a strong regionalisation. Furthermore, the support measures for EU quality schemes are now comprised under the list of tools that a Member State can activate and implement under the type of measure “Cooperation”.

Nevertheless, the possibility to support the EU quality schemes has remained the same, since the two measures under “Cooperation” type of measure mirror exactly the previous measure 3:

- Rural development measure SRG03 supporting producers’ adhesion to quality schemes by covering the certification costs (like ex-measure 3.1) is *de facto* excluding the OQT “mountain product” from its beneficiaries; and
- Rural development measure SRG10 supporting promotion of quality products (like ex-measure 3.2) continues to focus on producer associations and does not recognise individual producers as beneficiaries of the support for promotion activities. Therefore, the possibility to promote "mountain product" is limited or even impossible due to the lack of associations or groups gathering together producers with the OQT "mountain product".

Overall, the analysis highlights the need for tailored support measures to address the needs of the OQT "mountain product" producers and suggests avenues for improvement for the future CAP.

3.4. Evaluation

The section E "Evaluation" of the survey aims to gather feedback and insights from participants regarding their experience with the OQT "mountain product". It includes questions about the main obstacles faced in promoting and distributing mountain products, recommendations for improving promotion and distribution strategies, perceptions about the interaction of the OQT with other quality labels, whether joining the scheme met expectations, and future plans regarding the use of the OQT.

3.4.1. Main obstacles to promotion and distribution (marketing) of mountain products

The question E1 gathered insights into the main challenges related to the promotion and distribution of mountain products, with responses received from Italy (109), France (3) and Romania (39). Out of these, 20 respondents from Italy, 1 from France and 7 from Romania reported that they did not encounter any obstacles in this regard, while the majority found some kind of challenge.

The question was an optional and open-ended one, meaning respondents were free to provide any obstacles they perceived without predefined categories. The categories created during the analysis summarise the main themes that emerged from the responses. The categories will be presented from the most to the least relevant in terms of frequency in the responses.

Table 29: Main obstacles to promotion and distribution (marketing) of mountain products.

Obstacles	Italy	Romania	France	Total
Lack of consumers awareness and recognition of the OQT	35	2	1	**38**
Lack of promotion and information	20	8	-	**28**
Competition	9	5	-	**14**
Logistic difficulties	8	1	-	**9**
Lack of public support	1	3	-	**4**
Lack of collective governance	2	1	-	**3**
Unfavourable market conditions	-	3	-	**3**

Lack of consumers awareness and recognition of the OQT "mountain product"

The challenge of the lack of consumer awareness and recognition of the OQT "mountain product" is a critical issue that extends its impact throughout the entire supply chain. The absence of consumer understanding and recognition of the OQT exacerbates the competition with lower-quality products.

Crucially, consumers are not familiar with the OQT logo[33] and do not know what it implies in terms of production rules and guarantees of product's origin from a mountainous area. This lack of awareness hampers their ability to appreciate the unique qualities and value associated with the OQT "mountain product". As a result, consumers may be unwilling to pay a premium price for a product from the mountain region because they do not fully understand the quality assurances and production standards represented by the OQT.

Moreover, this **lack in awareness and recognition extends beyond individual consumers to wholesalers, processors, and even tourists**. These key players in the supply chain may not fully grasp the added value and significance of the OQT. Wholesalers and processors, for instance, may not see the market advantage of dealing with OQT-labelled mountain products. Tourists visiting the mountainous areas may also miss out on the opportunity to appreciate and support local products due to their lack of familiarity with the OQT designation.

In essence, the lack of consumer awareness and recognition of the OQT "mountain product" has broader implications, affecting not only individual purchasing decisions but also influencing the perceptions and choices made by various stakeholders within the supply chain.

[33] This is specific for Italy and Romania where a national logo has been introduced.

Lack of promotion and information

Producers face challenges in **effectively communicating the unique product characteristics and quality to consumers**. This is strongly related to the **inadequate promotion and information** surrounding the OQT "mountain product".

In particular, the Italian respondents emphasise a fundamental **lack of institutional promotion for the OQT** and its associated Italian logo by public authorities. Additionally, there is a notable lack of coordination between public and private initiatives, contributing to a fragmented promotional landscape. Insufficient promotional material further worsens the issue, with one producer noting the absence of a centralised website showcasing all OQT-labelled products.

On the Romanian front, respondents highlight that **producers often lack the necessary skills and resources** to organise effective promotional campaigns. Moreover, the **high costs associated with promotion** further exacerbate the issue, leaving many mountain producers struggling to showcase their products on a broader scale.

Finally, some Italian respondents draw attention to a specific deficiency in tourist-oriented promotion and the challenges in disseminating information about "mountain products" to tourists. This underscores the importance of addressing not only general promotion but also targeting specific audience segments, such as tourists, to enhance the visibility of OQT "mountain product".

Competition

The primary reasons cited for the **competition** faced by mountain products are higher costs and **insufficient production quantities**. These challenges lead to the confrontation with similar products from lowland areas, with lower quality and a lower price.

Consequently, mountain products are **undervalued**, resulting in a lack of added value for producers in terms of income, a situation contrary to the expectations associated with the OQT "mountain product".

Competitive dynamics are not limited to comparisons with lowland products; they also manifest among mountain producers at different altitudes. In fact, while production rules are not differentiated per altitude, productions located at higher altitude are bonded by a shorter production season and suffer from competition from producer below 1000 meters.

Additionally, one respondent highlights competition with other quality schemes and origin products that garner more attention and support from public administrations. Unfair competition is noted with producers who misuse the term "mountain" without adhering to the OQT rules.

Lastly, Romanian respondents emphasise unfair competition from imported and counterfeited products, further complicating the competitive landscape for mountain producers.

Logistic difficulties

The respondents highlight that production in mountain areas is usually linked to **higher costs**. In fact, the impervious territory and the remoteness from populated urban centres bring logistic challenges and difficulties especially when dealing with transports and refrigerated distribution.

These challenges are often strengthened by climate change, that has a greater impact on mountain areas.

As a consequence, mountain businesses are smaller than lowland and mountain productions are often **niche products** characterised by **small volumes of production**.

Lack of public support

The deficiency in substantial public support poses a considerable obstacle to the successful implementation of the OQT. This challenge encompasses various aspects, ranging from the **absence or inadequacy of public funding designated for the support and promotion of the OQT** to the overarching deficiency in a strategic policy framework that advocates for the economic activities in mountainous regions.

This lack of access to dedicated funds is confirmed also by the analysis of questions D5, D6 and D7 on public support to the producers adhering to the OQT "mountain product" (for complete analysis see paragraphs 3.3.4 and 3.3.5). The same has been brough to evidence in the replies to the survey for regional administrations.

Lack of collective governance

The absence of collective governance among mountain producers contributes to fragmented efforts and hinders their ability to promote the OQT "mountain product". Furthermore, associations involving small producers from mountain areas are nearly non-existent, meaning there is a **lack of organised groups that could potentially advocate for the interests of these producers collectively**. Additionally, when there are producer associations or groups in place, they may be ineffective and costly. These associations might struggle to provide tangible benefits to their members, and the expenses associated with membership or participation could outweigh the advantages.

Unfavourable market conditions

Some Romanian respondents highlight the challenge arising from **unfavourable market conditions**. A significant concern is the absence of adequate spaces in food markets. Inadequate storage facilities, improper handling practices, and a lack of dedicated sections for specialty products can compromise the integrity of OQT "mountain products".

In conclusion, the challenges facing the promotion and distribution of mountain products, as highlighted in the survey responses from Italy, France, and Romania, stem from both specific obstacles related to the OQT and broader issues inherent to mountainous regions. While some hurdles, such as the lack of consumer awareness and recognition of the OQT, directly impact the marketability of mountain products, others, like logistic difficulties and competition, are characteristic of mountainous areas in general. **It is difficult to assess what is intrinsic of the OQT and what is a general condition for mountain producers**. Nevertheless, these challenges are interconnected, shaping a complex landscape where the success of promoting and distributing mountain products relies on addressing both specific OQT-related issues and broader mountain-region challenges.

3.4.2. Recommendations to improve the marketing of mountain products

After identifying the marketing challenges for “mountain products”, the question E2 gathered feedback concerning the possible recommendations to their promotion and distribution, with responses received from Italy (93), France (3) and Romania (34).

The question was an optional and open-ended one, meaning respondents were free to provide any recommendation to improve the marketing of mountain products, without predefined categories. The analysis presents the most relevant recommendations in terms of frequency in the replies.

In line with the replies to the previous questions, the primary and most urgent objective is to **enhance the visibility and awareness of the OQT “mountain product” among consumers.** Achieving this goal requires collaborative efforts, as producers need the **support from public administrations.** This support should include assistance in collecting information, organisation of public event and fairs on the OQT, and provision of public funding for promotion activities. Respondents outlined different kind of actions to raise consumer awareness, such us:

- Public and private advertising campaigns to promote mountain products (on regional and national radio, TV, newspapers and social media);
- Organising fairs, markets and events dedicated to mountain products;
- Establishing a national day dedicated to the OQT “mountain product”;
- Developing a dedicated website listing all mountain producers using the OQT;
- Encouraging the use of local mountain products in local restaurants and shops;
- Supporting the display of OQT-labelled products in supermarkets.

Key messages to convey during these campaigns include:

- Highlighting the contribution of mountain agriculture to public good such as land protection, ecosystem services, social value for mountain communities;
- Emphasising the identification of the territory associated with mountain products;
- Providing detailed information on specific product qualities (e.g. organoleptic characteristics) and OQT specifications;
- Highlight the challenges in production to justify the value of the end product and its sale price.

Building a **compelling narrative** around the OQT is also essential to convey what a mountain product represents in terms of its unique characteristics and its impact on mountain communities.

It is imperative for the promotion campaigns to target not only **local and regional consumers but also national and international markets.**

Equally important is the need to **raise awareness, inform, and train mountain producers** about the OQT “mountain product”.

To effectively reach tourists, establishing connections with companies promoting tourism in mountain areas is recommended. Additionally, raising awareness among distributors is crucial for expanding the reach of OQT-labelled products.

To further strengthen the OQT, there is a recommendation to support the **establishment of collective governance among mountain producers**, creating a network for sharing information and facilitating collaboration.

Finally, there is a strong emphasis on **enhancing control measures** to address competitors and individuals who exploit the mountain origin of products for misleading purposes. The proposed solution involves implementing stricter regulations to prevent the inappropriate use of the term "mountain" in conjunction with the names of products that fail to comply with the OQT standards. Essentially, this suggests prohibiting the use of the term "mountain" for products that do not adhere to the OQT, thereby safeguarding the integrity and authenticity of the label.

3.4.3. Interaction between the OQT "mountain product" and other quality schemes

The question E3 sought to understand stakeholders' perspectives on whether the OQT "mountain product" interacts synergistically or potentially overlaps with other quality labels. Respondents were asked to provide insights into how they perceive the relationship between the OQT and existing quality schemes.

The question was an optional and open-ended one, meaning respondents were free to provide their view without predefined answer. The categories created during the analysis summarise the main themes that emerged from the responses. The categories will be presented from the most to the least relevant in terms of frequency in the responses.

We received 75 replies from Italy, 36 from Romania, and 3 from France.

Table 30: Interactions between the OQT "mountain product" and other quality schemes

Interaction	Italy	Romania	France	Total
Positive Interaction and Complementarity	46	31	2	**79**
Concerns about Overlapping	9	1	-	**10**
Lack of interaction due to lack of recognition of the OQT	10	-	-	10
Not interested in integrating the OQT with other quality certifications	2	-	1	**3**
Don't know	8	4	-	**10**

Positive Interaction and Complementarity

The majority of respondents express a positive view (79), stating that the OQT interacts positively with and complements the information of other quality labels. It is seen as an additional value and a good integration with certifications like organic, PDO/PGI, and other quality schemes. In this context, producers appreciate the enhanced value and comprehensive information that the OQT adds to their products.

Concerns about Overlapping

Some producers, however, express concerns about potential overlapping when the OQT is combined with other quality labels (10). These concerns revolve around the possibility of confusion among consumers when multiple certifications are present. To address this issue, there is an emphasis on the need for clear communication and differentiation. Producers highlight the importance of avoiding confusion to ensure that consumers can easily understand and distinguish the unique qualities represented by each certification.

Lack of interaction due to lack of recognition of the OQT

A subset of respondents (10) notes that there is a lack of interaction with the OQT, primarily due to its limited recognition among consumers. In these cases, producers highlight that the effectiveness of the OQT may be hindered by its relatively low level of awareness. This suggests that efforts to increase recognition and visibility of the OQT are crucial for fostering positive interaction with other quality certifications.

Not interested in integrating the OQT with other quality certifications

Some producers (3) express a lack of interest in integrating the OQT with other quality certifications. For these respondents, the primary focus is on conveying the message of mountain origin and emphasising the associated quality and characteristics of their products. In essence, these producers prioritise the uniqueness of the OQT and choose not to combine it with other certifications.

In summary, most producers perceive a positive interaction and complementarity between the OQT and other quality certifications. However, some express concerns about potential overlapping and cite limited interaction due to low recognition of the OQT. Additionally, a small group of producers expresses a lack of interest in integrating the OQT with other certifications, preferring to use the OQT exclusively to put emphasis on the mountain origin.

3.4.4. Expectations on the OQT “mountain product”

The question E4 delved into stakeholders' expectations regarding their participation in the optional quality term "mountain product".

Table 31 illustrates the extent to which participants' expectations were met upon joining the optional quality indication "mountain product" scheme, segmented by country. Among the total respondents, **60% declared that joining the OQT met their expectation**. In Italy, 56% of respondents reported that their expectations were met, while in Romania, this figure was higher at 72%. Conversely, 44% of Italian respondents, 28% of Romanian respondents, and 33% of French respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the scheme's alignment with their expectations.

Table 31: Realisation of respondents' expectations towards the OQT "mountain product" by country (N and %)[34].

	Italy		Romania		France	Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	N	%
Yes	84	56%	41	72%	2	127	60%
No	66	44%	16	28%	1	83	40%

Among those respondents who replied positively, the majority affirmed that the **sales increased** (43 replies) and they expanded the **product sales channels** (30). Furthermore, 28 producers declared selling the product at a **higher price**. Other advantages reported are increased information on product quality characteristics and higher consumers interest; and the valorisation of the mountain product together with its territory, which brings an added value to the production.

Table 32: Positive outcomes if the OQT met respondent expectations.

	Italy	Romania	France	Total
Increase in sales	23	19	1	**43**
Expansion of sales channel	24	15	1	**30**
Higher price	17	11	-	**28**
Other	26	3	1	**30**
Total	**90**	**48**	**3**	**141**

Around 40% of total respondents declared that the OQT did not meet their expectations. The percentage in this case is higher for Italian producers (44%) than for Romanians (28%).

[34] Respondents that declared that the OQT met their expectation were asked to specify in what terms, choosing multiple option from a predefined list. Therefore, the total number of replies in table 32 is higher than the total number of positive replies (yes) in table 31.

Table 33 : Lack of positive outcome if the OQT did not meet respondent expectations[35].

	Italy	Romania	France	Total
No increase in selling price of the products	30	12	-	**42**
No increase in sales	38	12	-	**50**
No expansion of the product's sales channels	36	4	-	**40**
Increased administrative obligations	8	3	-	**11**
Other	9	1	-	**10**
Total	**121**	**32**	**-**	**153**

When asked to specify in what terms the OQT did not meet their expectations, the majority of producers replied that they did not experience an increase in sales (50 replies) nor in the selling price of their products (42 replies). Furthermore, they did not expand the product's sales channels (40 replies). Some producers (11 replies) even mentioned the increased administrative obligations related to joining the scheme.

Another challenge reported both by Italian and Romanian producers is the lack of communication to consumers which is essential to ensure the success of the scheme.

Box 3: Perception of regional administrations on the realization of the expected advantages of the OQT "mountain product"

This topic was also explored by MOVING survey for regional administrations, to assess their perceptions regarding whether the expected advantages of the OQT "mountain product" have been realised. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they believe these anticipated benefits have been realised, selecting from three options: "Yes," "Uncertain," or "No." The question was divided into two main categories of expected advantages:

1. Tool for producers to better market their product.
2. Reduction of the risk of consumer confusion concerning the mountain provenance of products

In terms of the **tool for producers to better market their product**, 7 respondents (out of 11) affirmed that the expected advantages have been realised, while 4 respondents expressed uncertainty. However, no respondents indicated that the expected advantages have not been realised for this aspect.

[35] Respondents that declared that the OQT did not meet their expectation were asked to specify in what terms, choosing multiple option from a predefined list. Therefore, the total number of replies in table 33 is higher than the total number of negative replies (no) in table 31.

Regarding the **reduction of consumer confusion concerning the mountain provenance of products**, the responses were more evenly distributed. 4 respondents stated that the expected advantages have been realized, 3 respondents indicated uncertainty, and 3 respondents expressed that the expected advantages have not been realised. This indicates a less definitive perspective on the scheme's effectiveness in reducing consumer confusion.

Overall, while there is a general consensus among respondents regarding the scheme's effectiveness as a marketing tool for producers, opinions are more divided concerning its efficacy in reducing consumer confusion. Further analysis may be necessary to understand the factors contributing to these perceptions and to identify potential areas for improvement in the implementation of the OQT "mountain product".

3.4.5. Impact of the OQT “mountain product” at territorial level

Question E7 aimed to assess the impact of the implementation of the OQT “mountain product” at territorial level, seeking to uncover whether the possibility to adhere to the OQT has created incentives for producers’ relocation in mountain areas. In particular, the question asked explicitly if respondent had relocated their business, or a part of it, in order to take advantage of the OQT “mountain product”.

Table 34: Impact of OQT “mountain product” on business relocation by country.

	Italy	Romania	France
Yes	3	9	-
No	131	39	3

This point should be further explored since the results indicate that only a small number of producers in Italy (3) and Romania (9) have relocated their businesses to take advantage of the OQT "mountain product," and no detailed explanations were provided regarding these relocations.

Box 4: Perception of regional administrations on the OQT as an incentive to relocate or develop value chains in mountain areas.

Responses from regional administrations’ survey align with the survey findings, suggesting that the OQT has not yet spurred significant relocation of businesses to mountain areas. Instead, **it appears that operators using the OQT are already established in these regions and are seeking opportunities to enhance the value and promotion of their products**. While some regions, such as Baden-Württemberg, see potential for the OQT to encourage production relocation, concrete examples of such relocation remain elusive. Nevertheless, collective initiatives to develop value chains in mountain areas, as observed in Occitanie, indicate ongoing efforts to leverage the OQT for regional development[36]. Further investigation into the factors influencing producers' decisions regarding business relocation in relation to the OQT is warranted to gain a deeper understanding of its impact.

3.4.6. Long term commitment of respondents to the OQT "mountain product"

Question E8 aimed to gauge the long-term commitment of respondents to the OQT scheme. By exploring their intentions regarding continued usage, we can gain valuable insights into the perceived benefits and challenges associated with the OQT "mountain product", as well as the level of satisfaction and confidence among producers in its effectiveness.

When asked if they plan to continue using the OQT, **the vast majority of producers (90%) replied affirmatively.** In line with the percentage of satisfaction, also in this case the percentage of positive replies is higher for Romanian producers (96%) than for Italian (87%). Only 1% of respondents declared they are going to stop using the OQT, while 9% did not reply to this question.

Table 35: Respondents who plan to continue using the OQT (N and %) by country.

	Italy		Romania		France	Total	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**N**	**%**
Yes	130	87%	55	96%	3	185	**90%**
No	3	2%	-	-	-	3	**1%**
N/A	17	11%	2	4%	-	19	**9%**

To go further into the analysis, it is interesting to combine the responses to question E4 on producers' expectations concerning the OQT "mountain product" and question E8 on respondents' long-term commitment to the OQT.

Out of 127 respondents that affirmed that their expectations regarding the OQT were met (see paragraph 3.4.4 for a detailed analysis of question E4), 122 declared that they intend to continue using the OQT. However, 5 respondents did not answer to the question. Among those intending to continue, 10 respondents provided detailed explanations for their decision, expressing their enthusiasm for the OQT and a shared belief that the OQT signifies high quality and has the potential to become a strong indicator of product excellence over time. This indicates confidence

[36] More information on the two examples concerning mountain milk (Montlait) and mountain pork meat (Origine Montagne).

in the label's ability to convey positive attributes to consumers and drive demand for the labelled products.

Moreover, several respondents mentioned plans to improve and enlarge their operations, such as expanding laboratories and sales networks. This suggests that they see the mountain product designation as a valuable asset in their growth strategies.

One respondent expressed regret over the exclusion of additional products from the mountain product designation (namely wool and yarn). This suggests that they see value in having a broader range of their products recognised under the OQT.

Finally, one respondent expressed a desire to collaborate with regional authorities or seek support for promoting the “mountain product” designation.

Table 36: Intersections of replies to question E4 on producers’ expectations concerning the OQT “mountain product” and question E8 on respondents’ long-term commitment to the OQT

	OQT Continuation	OQT Discontinuation	Total
Expectations met	122	-	127
Expectations not met	67	3	83

On the other hand, **among the 83 respondents that affirmed that the OQT did not met their expectations, 67 declared also that they intend to continue using the OQT**, with 13 blank answers and only 3 negative replies.

Among those intending to continue, 11 respondents provided detailed explanations for their decision. There is a prevailing sentiment of belief in the OQT and its potential benefits among respondents. Many express hopes for increased visibility and consumer awareness of the added value of mountain products over time. The absence of direct costs associated with the OQT is particularly appreciated, allowing producers to maintain its use even if the full benefits are not yet realised. Alternatively, some respondents are more critical, stating that they are currently evaluating whether to continue using the OQT based on achieving higher income. Challenges in production, low returns, and additional costs linked to the OQT may lead those respondents to consider discontinuing its use.

Among the 3 negative replies, one respondent expressed concerns about increasing costs without a corresponding increase in revenue, leading to the decision to stop using the OQT. Another producer cited the closure of a local slaughterhouse as the reason for losing eligibility for the OQT. Finally, the third producer highlighted the dilemma of choosing between not using the IFQ or relocating the entire production to mountain regions to comply with its requirements, but with the risk of reduced productivity due to the unpredictable effects of climate change.

In conclusion, the **long-term commitment of respondents** to the OQT "mountain product" scheme reflects a **generally positive outlook**, with a majority intending to continue using the designation. This commitment is further reinforced by the intersection of responses to questions regarding producers' expectations and their intentions to continue using the OQT. Among those whose expectations were met, a strong belief in the OQT's potential benefits and quality indicators is evident, along with plans to enhance operations and capitalise on the scheme's advantages. Conversely, some respondents, while intending to continue, expressed concerns about challenges such as increasing costs and low returns, indicating a need for further evaluation of the scheme's effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes. Nevertheless, the overall sentiment points towards a **recognition of the OQT's value and its potential to enhance the visibility and consumer appeal of mountain products over time**.

3.4.7. General recommendations to improve the OQT "mountain product"

Question E9 seeks to uncover areas for improvement in the implementation of the OQT "mountain product". By soliciting feedback on potential enhancements, this question aims to identify specific aspects of the scheme that may be lacking or in need of refinement according to the perspectives of respondents. Analysing the responses to this question can provide valuable insights into the perceived shortcomings of the current system and help guide future initiatives aimed at optimising the OQT "mountain product".

The question was an optional and open-ended one, meaning respondents were free to provide any recommendation, without predefined categories. The analysis presents the most relevant recommendations in terms of frequency in the replies.

Even if questions E2 was more specific on recommendations on the improvement of the marketing of mountain products, while E9 was more open to general recommendations, several replies overlap with the previous analysis.

Addressing the previous challenges requires a **collaborative approach between producers, local & regional authorities, national authorities and other stakeholders**.

The respondents advocate for **increased support and resources from public administration**. This could involve engaging with relevant authorities to address specific challenges faced by mountain producers and ensuring that they receive adequate assistance. The main recommendations for actions concern:

Promotion of OQT Products and information to Consumers

- Develop a **comprehensive promotion strategy** that includes digital and traditional channels to promote OQT mountain products. This strategy should focus on conveying the uniqueness, quality, and cultural significance of these products.
- **Enhance communication channels and strategies to provide more detailed and easily accessible information** about OQT "mountain products" to consumers. This could include online platforms, labelling improvements, and marketing materials that clearly communicate the unique aspects and benefits of these products.

- Work on **improving the OQT label design and its promotion** to make it more attractive and recognisable to consumers[37].
- Collaborate with retailers, distributors, and relevant stakeholders to **increase the presence of OQT mountain products on the national market.**

Active Measures to Support Producers

Proactive measures to support mountain producers should be implemented, such as training programs, funding, or assistance in navigating regulatory processes.

- Provide **clear guidelines and training programs for producers** on how to apply and use the OQT label. This ensures that all producers understand and adhere to the standards associated with the label.
- Develop collaboration between producers and local authorities to **establish and promote local markets in areas with tourism potential**. This can create additional sales channels and enhance the visibility of OQT "mountain products" among tourists.
- Explore and advocate for **tax incentives** that can encourage both producers and processing companies to participate in the OQT "mountain product". This can stimulate growth and investment in the sector.
- **Strengthen the monitoring and inspection mechanisms** to ensure the correct application of the OQT label on farms. This ensures the integrity and authenticity of the labelled products.
- **Improving access to infrastructure in mountainous areas**, ensuring better transportation and logistical support for producers.
- Tighten Derogations for Processing Companies (one French producer): review regulations to ensure that processing companies located outside the mountain area adhere to stricter guidelines. This could involve policy adjustments or increased oversight to maintain the authenticity and quality associated with OQT "mountain products".

Box 5: Barriers, threats and policy recommendations identified by regional administrations.

The responses from regional authorities concerning barriers, threats and policy recommendations underscore various obstacles to the effective rollout of the OQT "mountain product" scheme.

Regional administrations identified several challenges faced by **producers**, such as limited access to dedicated funds, inadequate awareness of the OQT among mountain producers, and doubts regarding its effectiveness as a valorisation tool in assuring economic benefit to farmers.

[37] This is relevant for the Italian and Romanian context were a national logo has been adopted.

Concerns also arise from the presence of well-established quality schemes and private brands, which may overshadow the OQT.

On the **consumer** side, there is a lack of awareness and lack of knowledge about the commitment's mountain producers must meet. Moreover, the absence of a certification systems undermines consumer confidence.

Both producers and consumers contend with a contradictory legal framework and the proliferation of competing quality schemes and private brands.

Regarding the legal framework, it is essential to note that although the term "mountain product" enjoys protection under EU legislation, there is a gap in prohibiting other references to mountains. Consequently, the image of the mountain is frequently exploited without restraint. This situation leads to inadequate protection for consumers who may be misled unlawfully and for producers who encounter unfair competition.

Policy recommendations include ensuring producer access to dedicated funding, implementing initiatives to enhance consumer recognition of the OQT and addressing the gap in the protection to references to mountains in products not complying with EU legislation.

3.4.8. Territorial promotion policies

Question E10 delved into the perspective of respondents regarding the suitability of promoting adherence to the OQT "mountain product" through territorial promotion policies. By asking whether such initiatives would be deemed appropriate, this question aims to gauge the support for using territorial promotion strategies to encourage participation in the scheme. Additionally, Question E11 collected specific suggestions from respondents on how administrations could effectively implement such policies if deemed appropriate. Analysing the responses to these questions provides valuable insights into the potential role of territorial promotion in bolstering the OQT "mountain product" and offers guidance for policymakers seeking to enhance its effectiveness.

The majority of respondents (80%) agree that it would be appropriate to encourage adherence to the scheme of the OQT through territorial promotion policies.

Table 37: Would it be appropriate to encourage adherence to the scheme of the OQT through territorial promotion policies?

	Italy	Romania	France	Total
Yes	116	49	2	167
%	77%	86%	-	80%

When asked to suggest some possible solutions and actions for public administrations, the vast majority of respondents pointed out that there is a strong need in terms of **promotional**

campaigns to raise consumer awareness (80 replies), as well as to reach retailers, processors, Horeca sectors and local shops. Suggestions concerning how to enhance promotion of these products include:

- Organising local markets events, tastings and fairs dedicated to mountain products;
- Dedicating a specific area for "mountain products" in the local markets;
- Facilitating participation of producers using the OQT "mountain products" in events and fairs organised by public administrations (i.e. through public funding);
- Organising local event for territorial promotion, involving local authorities and actors of touristic sector;
- Advertising in large-scale distribution and mass media, in national agricultural fairs and in in food and tourism magazines;
- Specific promotional material: small digital catalogues for each territory, use of logo with the QR code to give consumers more information on the OQT, creation of a common website for mountain products from the same region, develop application to promote OQT "mountain product".

Respondents also agree on the need to target producers with **information campaigns for producers** with trained technicians (11 replies), involving in this dissemination and information effort also producer associations and organisations to reach even more producers.

Furthermore, **training for producers** (21 replies) interested in using the OQT are considered essential in order to explain them how to use OQT and present them with concrete suggestions and marketing solutions to make the most of the OQT.

Other suggestions include:

- Supporting the creation of mountain producer associations/groups and strengthening existing producer associations/groups;
- Encouraging the combination with other territorial brands and quality schemes (GIs);
- Financial support for producers willing to invest in mountain areas;
- Training for public administration dealing with the OQT;
- Include mountain producers in consultations concerning rural development programmes;
- Public support for producers wanting to open up to foreign markets;
- Support in expanding product sales channels.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Firstly, it's important to acknowledge the limited geographical representativeness of the survey replies, particularly with only three countries included and a minimal response from France, comprising just three replies. This represents one third of the MS that implemented the OQT "mountain product" at national level (Euromontana, 2020). This lack of comprehensive data from the other MS warrants further analysis to gather additional evidence and rigorously test the findings presented.

However, despite these limitations, valuable insights can still be gleaned from the survey findings. By carefully examining the responses received, some key messages can be identified providing initial indications and areas for further exploration.

4.1. Main findings on producers using the OQT

The survey findings provide interesting insights into the **demographics and characteristics of producers participating in the OQT "mountain product" scheme**. Among the respondents, **primary producers** constitute the majority at 61%, followed by on-farm processors at 28%, and off-farm processors at 11%. Delving into the product categories covered, the survey reveals that **fruit, vegetable, and cereal** products, whether **fresh or processed**, are the most represented (34%). Following closely are honey and other bee products (23%), and milk, cheeses, and other dairy products (22%). Furthermore, an analysis of the value of production under the OQT "mountain product" scheme indicates a predominance of **smaller to medium-scale producers**, with a limited number of high-value producers. This underscores the significant participation of small-scale producers within the scheme. Additionally, the survey sheds light on the extent of production utilising the OQT "mountain product" designation, with a substantial portion of producers (44%) indicating that they apply the label to the **entirety of their production**.

Producers predominantly learned about the OQT "mountain product" through online sources and traditional media like newspapers and magazines, which accounted for 33% of responses, while 30% cited word of mouth between operators. The main **motivation for joining** the OQT was to increase product **visibility** in the market, cited by 72% of producers. Additionally, 22% were interested in accessing support and funding from rural development programmes, while 21% aimed to enhance company profit margins.

The **primary target market** for the majority of producers (75%) is **local**, followed by retailers (34%) and company shops (31%). Approximately 44% of respondents stated that they have undergone **inspections** by the relevant authorities. In line with the fact that the adhesion to the OQT is free of charge in all three countries, an overwhelming majority of respondents (85%) confirmed that adhering to the **OQT did not result in increased costs** for them.

In terms of adhesion to other quality schemes, only a **minority of respondents** (22%) participate in **additional quality schemes**, with no significant differences observed across countries. Regarding the interaction between the OQT and other quality schemes, most producers perceive a **positive synergy and complementarity** between them.

Only 24% of respondents declared having received **support or assistance** from public administrations in joining the scheme. This mainly revolved around clarifying the criteria for participation and aiding in retrieving and filling out the necessary forms. While only 5 respondents received financial aid for the promotion of the OQT.

The impact of the OQT "mountain product" at the territorial level warrants further exploration, as the survey results indicate minimal business relocations in Italy (3) and Romania (9) linked to the scheme, with no detailed explanations provided. Regional administrations' responses align with these findings, indicating that **the OQT hasn't spurred significant business relocations to mountain areas yet**. While some regions anticipate potential relocation benefits, concrete examples are lacking. However, collective efforts in regions like Occitanie show ongoing attempts to use the OQT for regional development. Further exploration is needed to understand factors influencing relocation decisions in relation to the OQT.

The evaluation of the OQT "mountain product" reveals a mixed response among respondents. **A majority (60%) expressed satisfaction**, citing increased sales, expanded sales channels, and higher product prices as key benefits. However, approximately 40% reported dissatisfaction, primarily due to a lack of sales growth, stagnant prices, and limited expansion of sales channels. Administrative burdens were also mentioned as a challenge by some respondents.

Despite these challenges, **the long-term commitment to the OQT remains strong**, with 88% of producers intending to continue using the designation. This reflects a generally positive outlook, driven by a belief in the scheme's potential benefits.

4.2. Main challenges and obstacles to the successful implementation of the OQT

The successful promotion and distribution of mountain products face several significant obstacles that hinder their market reach and consumer recognition. Primarily, there is a **critical lack of awareness and understanding among consumers** regarding the OQT, impeding their ability to appreciate the quality and value associated with mountain products. This lack of recognition extends across various stakeholders, including wholesalers, processors, and tourists.

Moreover, **inadequate institutional promotion and coordination** exacerbate the fragmented promotional landscape. Furthermore, mountain producers contend with stiff **competition** from similar products sourced from lowland areas, often priced lower and of inferior quality. Additionally, **logistical challenges** inherent to production in mountainous regions pose significant hurdles.

Intensifying these challenges are the **absence of designated public support mechanisms tailored to aid the promotion of OQT mountain products**, alongside a **lack of collective governance** to advocate for mountain producers' interests.

Concerns raised by regional authorities echo these challenges, emphasising limited access to funding, **insufficient awareness among producers** concerning the OQT existence and its conditions of use, and doubts about the scheme's efficacy in ensuring economic benefits. Regarding the legal framework, regional administrations note **a gap in prohibiting other references to mountains** despite the protection afforded to the term "mountain product" under EU legislation. This gap allows for the exploitation of the mountain image without restraint, leading to inadequate consumer protection and unfair competition for producers.

In conclusion, the challenges stem from both specific obstacles related to the OQT and broader issues inherent to mountainous regions. While some hurdles, such as the lack of consumer awareness and recognition of the OQT, directly impact the marketability of mountain products, others, like logistic difficulties and competition, are characteristic of mountainous areas in general. **It is difficult to assess what is intrinsic of the OQT and what is a general condition for mountain producers**. Nevertheless, these challenges are interconnected, shaping a complex landscape where the success of promoting and distributing mountain products relies on addressing both specific OQT-related issues and broader mountain-region challenges.

Addressing these issues necessitates policy interventions aimed at enhancing producer access to dedicated funding, improving consumer recognition of the OQT, and rectifying gaps in legal protections for mountain references.

4.3. Policy recommendations

Effective solutions to the previous challenges demand a **concerted effort** targeting various stakeholders, including producers, consumers, and other relevant actors like wholesalers, processors, and tourists. In this section, we present a comprehensive set of policy recommendations gathered from both producers and regional administrations. These recommendations are structured to **target specific levels of governance—be it at the EU, national, or regional level**—where interventions can effectively address particular issues hindering the scheme's success.

3.1.1. EU level

At the EU level, policymakers can play a pivotal role in addressing key challenges faced by producers participating in the OQT "mountain product".

- Firstly, it is fundamental to **design a specific measure to support OQT producers'** efforts in adhering to the scheme's requirements and promoting their products effectively. By earmarking specific funds or subsidies for mountain producers, the EU can provide essential financial support to bolster their operations and enhance their competitiveness in the market.
- Secondly, initiatives aimed at **enhancing consumer recognition of the OQT** are crucial for increasing demand and market penetration of mountain products. Through **targeted promotion campaigns**, the EU can raise awareness among consumers about the unique attributes and benefits of OQT "mountain product". This will not only foster consumer trust

but also stimulate demand for mountain products, thereby driving economic growth in mountainous regions.

- Furthermore, **addressing the legal gap in the protection of references to mountains** in products not complying with EU legislation is essential for ensuring fair competition and consumer protection. By strengthening regulatory frameworks and enforcing stringent labelling standards, the EU can prevent the misuse of mountain-related terminology on non-compliant products. This will safeguard the integrity of the OQT "mountain product" label and uphold the credibility of mountain producers, ultimately enhancing market transparency and consumer confidence.
- **Encourage Member States** with mountainous areas that have not yet adopted the OQT **to incorporate it into their national legislation**.

Overall, concerted action at the EU level is indispensable for creating an enabling environment that empowers mountain producers, promotes consumer awareness, and safeguards the integrity of the OQT "mountain product". By implementing these policy recommendations, the EU can foster sustainable development and prosperity in mountainous regions, while also promoting the cultural and environmental heritage associated with mountain agriculture.

3.1.2. National level

- **Enhance consumer awareness of the OQT "mountain product" through the development of comprehensive promotion strategies and campaigns.** These initiatives should spotlight the unique attributes of OQT "mountain products" and their significance to mountain communities. Collaborative efforts with retailers, distributors, and stakeholders are essential to expand the presence of mountain products in national and international markets.
- **Strengthen control measures at the national** level to combat misleading use of the term "mountain" by competitors. This involves implementing stricter regulations to prohibit the inappropriate use of the term "mountain" in conjunction with product names that do not meet OQT standards. By doing so, the integrity and authenticity of the OQT can be preserved.
- **Review the effects of derogations granted to processing companies operating outside mountainous regions at the national level.** If relevant to the specific case, this may entail revising the national implementation of the OQT, such as decreasing the allowable distance for processing outside mountain areas.
- **Improve infrastructure access in mountainous areas** to provide better transportation and logistical support for producers.

3.1.3. National and/or regional level

- Implement proactive measures such as **training programs and regulatory assistance** to support mountain producers. Provide clear **guidelines for producers** on applying and using the OQT "mountain product".
- Support the creation and strengthening of **mountain producer associations or groups** to enhance collective governance and advocacy, creating a network for sharing information and facilitating collaboration.
- Provide **financial support** for producers investing in mountain areas. To address the lack of specific support for OQT producers under CAP strategic plans, national/regional authorities could provide **indirect support**. This may include **assigning priority** scores to operators using the OQT when applying for aid under other support measures.
- **Include mountain producers in consultations** on CAP strategic plans to ensure their needs and perspectives are represented.

3.1.4. Regional and local level

- Encourage adherence to the OQT scheme through **territorial promotion policies**, focusing on consumer awareness as well as to reach retailers, processors, Horeca sectors and local shops.
- Develop collaboration between producers and local authorities to **establish and promote local markets with a specific area dedicated to "mountain products" in areas with tourism potential**. This can create additional sales channels and enhance the visibility of OQT mountain products among tourists.
- Organising **tastings and fairs** dedicated to mountain products with a focus on territorial promotion to involve the touristic sector;
- **Facilitating participation of producers** using the OQT "mountain product" in events and fairs organised by public administrations (i.e. through public funding);
- **Develop specific promotional materials**, including digital catalogues and common websites for regional mountain products.

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5. References

EU legislation

Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 665/2014 of 11 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to conditions of use of the optional quality term “mountain product.

Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 November 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs.

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.

Regulation (EU) 2017/2393 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2017 amending Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), (EU) No 1306/2013 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy, (EU) No 1307/2013 establishing rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within the framework of the common agricultural policy, (EU) No 1308/2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products and (EU) No 652/2014 laying down provisions for the management of expenditure relating to the food chain, animal health and animal welfare, and relating to plant health and plant reproductive material.

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union of 13 December 2007 — consolidated version (OJ C 202, 7.6.2016, pp. 47-360).

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Decreto di modifica del decreto del Ministro delle politiche agricole, alimentari e forestali del 26 luglio 2017, n. 51167 recante disposizioni nazionali per l’attuazione del regolamento (UE) n. 1151/12 e del regolamento delegato (UE) n. 665/2014 sulle condizioni d’utilizzo dell’indicazione facoltativa di qualità “prodotto di montagna”.

https://www.politicheagricole.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeAttachment.php/L/IT/D/1%252F1%252F8%252FD.03bd12a998fdaf845e61/P/BLOB%3AID%3D11687/E/pdf?mode=download

Decreto del Ministro delle politiche agricole, alimentari e forestali del 2 agosto 2018 sull'Istituzione del logo identificativo per l'indicazione facoltativa di qualità "prodotto di montagna" in attuazione del Decreto Ministeriale 26 luglio 2017 n. 57167.

https://www.politicheagricole.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeAttachment.php/L/IT/D/8%252F5%252F1%252FD.bb74b721d4d4655bc324/P/BLOB%3AID%3D11687/E/pdf?mode=download

Decreto del Ministro delle politiche agricole, alimentari e forestali del 20 luglio 2018 che definisce le linee guida sulla verifica di quanto disposto dall'art. 2, comma 3 del decreto ministeriale n. 57167 del 26/07/2017 concernente disposizioni nazionali per l'attuazione del regolamento (UE) n. 1151/2012 e del regolamento delegato (UE) n. 665/2014 sulle condizioni di utilizzo dell'indicazione facoltativa di qualità "prodotto di montagna" in merito all'origine degli alimenti destinati all'alimentazione animale.

https://www.politicheagricole.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeAttachment.php/L/IT/D/7%252F9%252F5%252FD.3ca47ac28530891c5070/P/BLOB%3AID%3D11687/E/pdf?mode=download

French legislation

Instruction technique DGPAAT/SDOE/2014-579, 17/07/2014

https://info.agriculture.gouv.fr/gedei/site/bo-agri/instruction-2014-579

Romanian legislation

HOTĂRÂRE nr. 506 din 20 iulie 2016 privind stabilirea cadrului instituțional și a unor măsuri pentru punerea în aplicare a Regulamentului delegat (UE) nr. 665/2014 al Comisiei din 11 martie 2014 de completare a Regulamentului (UE) nr. 1.151/2012 al Parlamentului European și al Consiliului în ceea ce privește condițiile de utilizare a mențiunii de calitate facultative "produs montan"

https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/180412

ORDIN nr. 49 din 14 ianuarie 2019 pentru modificarea și completarea anexei la Ordinul ministrului agriculturii și dezvoltării rurale nr. 52/2017 privind aprobarea Procedurii de verificare a conformității datelor cuprinse în caietul de sarcini în vederea acordării dreptului de utilizare a mențiunii de calitate facultative "produs montan" și de verificare a respectării legislației europene și naționale de către operatorii economici care au obținut dreptul de utilizare a respectivei mențiuni

https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/210544

ORDIN nr. 174 din 20 iulie 2021 privind aprobarea Procedurii de verificare a conformității datelor cuprinse în caietul de sarcini în vederea acordării dreptului de utilizare a mențiunii de calitate facultative "produs montan" și de realizare a controlului în vederea verificării respectării legislației europene și naționale de către operatorii economici care au obținut dreptul de utilizare a respectivei mențiuni

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Finco, A., Bentivoglio, D., & Bucci, G. (2017). A label for mountain products? Let's turn it over to producers and retailers. Quality - Access to Success, 18(S2), 198–205.

Mazzocchi, C., & Sali, G. (2022). Supporting mountain agriculture through "mountain product" label: a choice experiment approach. Environment, Development and Sustainability, 24(1), 701–723. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-021-01464-3

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Annex I: Survey for regional administrations

LimeSurvey

This work is part of MOVING, a 4-year research and innovation project funded by the EU Horizon 2020 programme and involving 23 partners from 15 countries. The project has multiple aims including delivering recommendations and a 'road map' for the updating/modernisation of relevant policy instruments to help build more resilient mountain value chains for private and public goods.

EU quality policy is a key element of this work, including the EU geographical indication system, voluntary certification schemes and most specifically the optional quality term (OQT) "mountain product" introduced by EU Regulation 1151/2012 and operationalised with conditions of use by EU Regulation 665/2014.

This survey has been drafted by the Association of European Region for Products of Origin (AREPO) in close collaboration with the European Association of Mountain Areas (Euromontana) and Highclere Consulting (HCC).

Section A: Contact details

Please note that the contact details that you will provide will not be published. The survey data will be anonymised so that personal identification will not be possible; it will then be analysed and the results will be integrated in the project reports. As most of the deliverables are public, they will be accessible via the project official website. Survey participants' answers will be treated confidentially so that personal identification will not be possible. For more information see Data Protection Section at the beginning of the survey.

A1. Contact details

First name

Last name

Email

Region

Section B: Mountain area concerned

B1. Brief description of the mountainous areas concerned at the regional level

Section C: Supporting measures for the Optional Quality Term "mountain product"

C1. Did rural development programme at regional level (2014-2020) included support measures for the OQT mountain product?

To reply to this question you can take into consideration both direct measures (ex. measure 3.2 on support for information and promotion activities concerning quality schemes) and indirect measures (for ex. where the OQT mountain product has been given a priority to obtain access to funding).

Yes ☐

No ☐

C2. If yes, please specify what kind of measures:

C3. How many producers benefitted from these measures?

C4. What was the budget dedicated to these support measures?

C5. From your perspective, have these measures been effective during the previous programming period (2014-2020) ?

Yes (please explain) ☐

Comment

No (please describe main limitations and problems) ☐

Comment

LimeSurvey

C6. **Has an evaluation study on the relevance of these measures been realised?** ***If yes, please provide the reference and the link.***

C7. **Have support measure for OQT mountain products been included in the new national CAP strategic plans or, where relevant, in the regional annexes?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

C8. **If yes, please describe the measures:**

C9. **Have the previous shortcoming and limitations (if existing) been addressed?** ***Please explain shortly.***

Section D: Producers' uptake & impact at territorial level

D1. **Data on producers uptake in your region:**

Number of producers using the OQT mountain product

Product categories covered [please make a list]

D2. **From your perspective, does the OQT represent an incentive to relocate or develop value chains in mountain areas?** ***Are you aware of producers who established in mountainous areas in order to use the OQT?***

D3. **Can you describe the best use cases for the OQT in your Region (up to 3 examples)?** ***Please, indicate the website of the farm/business and a contact when possible.***

The contact will be used only for the purpose of the case studies to follow up directly with the cases identified in order to collect more information.

D4. **From your knowledge, is the OQT used as a standalone quality term or together with other quality terms?**

- Standalone quality term ☐
- Together with other quality terms ☐

D5. **Do you believe the OQT interact positively and complement the information of other quality labels or overlap with them?** ***Please elaborate shortly.***

D6. **Have the expected advantages of this scheme been realised?**

	Yes	Uncertain	No
Tool for producers to better market their product	☐	☐	☐
Reduce the risk of consumer confusion concerning the mountain provenance of products	☐	☐	☐
Other [please specify below]	☐	☐	☐

D7. *Optional*: **please justify your answer briefly**

Section E: To go further on the producers' uptake

E1. **Are there any public initiatives at national, regional or local level (different from Rural Development Plans support) to go further on the producers' uptake?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

E2. **Please describe briefly these initiatives and indicate the website when possible.**

E3. **Do you know any private initiatives to support producers' uptake?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

E4. **Please describe them briefly:**

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Section F: Barriers, threats and policy recommendations

F1. **What are the main barriers and threats to the implementation of the OQT at national and regional level?**

F2. **What would be your policy recommendations at EU and national level?**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Annex II: Survey for producers

This work is part of MOVING, a 4-year research and innovation project funded by the EU Horizon 2020 programme and involving 23 partners from 15 countries. The project has multiple aims including delivering recommendations and a 'road map' for the updating/modernisation of relevant policy instruments to help build more resilient mountain value chains for private and public goods.

EU quality policy is a key element of this work, including the EU geographical indication system, voluntary certification schemes and most specifically the optional quality term (OQT) "mountain product" introduced by EU Regulation 1151/2012 and operationalised with conditions of use by EU Regulation 665/2014.

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Section A: Contact details

Please note that the contact details that you will provide will not be published. The survey data will be anonymised so that personal identification will not be possible; it will then be analysed and the results will be integrated in the project reports. As most of the deliverables are public, they will be accessible via the project official website. Survey participants' answers will be treated confidentially so that personal identification will not be possible. For more information see Data Protection Section at the beginning of the survey.

A1. Contact details

First name

Last name

Email

Country

Region

Section B: Data on registered users

B1. Farm / business name

B2. Website

B3. **Please indicate one of the following categories for your activity:**

- primary production ☐
- on-farm processor ☐
- off-farm processor ☐

B4. **Indicate the number of animals bred with reference to the year 2022.**
Total number of animals reared:

B5. **Indicate the farm hectares of arable land, agricultural crops, permanent grassland and pasture used for the production of products with the OQT "mountain products" for the year 2022.** ***Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA):***

B6. **If processing company, please indicate the number of employees:**

B7. **Please specify the product category**

- Fresh meat and meat products ☐
- Milk, cheeses and other dairy products ☐
- Other products of animal origin ☐
- Fruit, vegetables and cereal, fresh or processed ☐
- Honey and other bee products ☐
- Bread, pastry, cakes, confectionery, biscuits and other bakery products ☐
- Fresh fish and fish products ☐
- Other ☐

Other

B8. **Do you also adhere to the PDO/PGI quality scheme or any other regional/national quality schemes?**

- Yes ☐
- No ☐

B9. **If yes, indicate the name of the PDO-PGI product or the name of the regional/national quality scheme:**

B10. **If you also adhere to a PDO/PGI quality scheme, does the OQT 'mountain product' appear on the label of these products in addition to the PDO/PGI symbol?**

- yes - the PDO/PGI symbol and the OQT 'mountain product' appear together on the label ☐
- no - I adhere to the PDO/PGI scheme in compliance with the product specifications governing mountain products, and use the optional quality term 'mountain product' for non-PDO/PGI products ☐
- no – I do not adhere to the PDO/PGI scheme and only use the OQT 'mountain product' ☐
- Other ☐

Other

B11. **What is the approximate value in thousands of euros of the products produced by your company in compliance with the OQT 'Mountain Product' label scheme?** ***Please indicate a range from..........thousands € to.......... thousands €***

B12. **What is the percentage of your production using the OQT 'Mountain Product'?**

Section C: Knowledge of the OQT mountain product

C1. **How did you learn about the existence of the OQT 'mountain product'?**

- Participation in conferences organised by privates /producer associations ☐
- Participation in events organised by public administrations ☐
- Internet - newspapers - magazines ☐
- Word of mouth between operators ☐
- Other ☐

Other

C2. **What motivated you to join the OQT 'mountain product' scheme?**

- Increased visibility of products on the market ☐
- Increasing company profit margins ☐
- Access to the support and funding of the rural development programmes ☐
- Other ☐

Other

Section D: Access to the scheme

D1. **Has joining the OQT 'mountain product' resulted in higher costs for you?**

- Yes ☐
- No ☐

D2. **If yes, please indicate what kind of costs:**

- Administrative ☐
- Controls ☐
- Adaptation of company structures ☐

Adaptation of production processes ☐

Other ☐

Other

D3. **Could you specify what is the target market for your products with the OQT 'mountain product'?**

Local [local markets, food shops in neighbouring municipalities, etc.] ☐

Company shop ☐

Retailers ☐

Other ☐

Other

D4. **Have you ever been controlled by the relevant authorities?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

D5. **Have you ever received support/assistance from public administrations [regions, provinces, public bodies] in joining the scheme?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

D6. **If yes, please specify what kind of assistance:**

Clarification of the requirements to be met for joining the scheme ☐

Support in retrieving and filling forms ☐

Financial support for promoting the OQT mountain product ☐

Other ☐

Other

D7. **If you have received financial support, was it under the framework of the rural development support measures? Please specify what measure.**

Section E: Evaluation

E1. **From your experience, what are the main obstacles with regard to promotion and distribution (marketing) of mountain products?**

E2. **From your perspective, do you have any recommendations on how the promotion and distribution (marketing) of mountain products could be improved to bring more benefits to producers?**

E3. **From your perspective, do you believe the OQT interact positively and complement the information of other quality labels or overlap with them?** ***Please explain briefly your answer.***

E4. **Has joining the scheme on the optional quality indication 'mountain product' met your expectations?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

E5. **If yes, in what terms?**

I sold the product at a higher price ☐

Sales have increased ☐

I expanded the product sales channel ☐

Other ☐

Other

E6. **If not, in what terms?**

The selling price of the product has not increased ☐

Sales have not increased ☐

I did not expand the product's sales channels ☐

Increased administrative obligations ☐

Other ☐

Other

E7. **Have you relocated your business or part of your business in order to take advantage of the OQT mountain product?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

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E8. **Do you plan to continue using the OQT ‘mountain product’?**

Yes ☐

No. Please explain briefly why in the comment box. ☐

E9. **What could be improved?**

E10. **Do you think it would be appropriate to encourage adherence to the scheme on the OQT 'mountain product' through territorial promotion policies?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

E11. **If so, would you have any suggestions for the Administrations?** ***For instance, promotional campaigns, trainings for producers…***

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.