

European Commission launches new handbook on geographical indications - Brussels, 27 June 2007

The European Commission has published on its website a new handbook on Geographical Indications. Geographical indications (GIs) are forms of identification which identify a product as originating in the territory of a particular country, or a region or locality in that country. For a GI product, its reputation for quality or any other characteristic is intimately linked to its geographical origin.

Geographical Indications are a type of intellectual property. They are very important in the EU, which has a rich history of local and specialist agricultural production and many famous products closely linked to their place of origin: think of Parma Ham, Roquefort cheese or Champagne.

Wider protection for Geographical Indications from around the world is a key goal for the EU in the ongoing WTO Doha trade negotiations.

The European Commission's handbook sets out the current worldwide situation with regard to the existence and protection of GIs. .

What makes a geographical indication?

Geographical Indications are usually geographical names. But non-geographical names can also be protected if they are linked to a particular place. The most famous example of such a GI is "Feta", which is not a place in Greece but is so closely connected to Greece as to be identified as an inherently Greek product.

There are three major conditions for the recognition of a sign as a geographical indication:

- it relates to a good although, in some countries, services are also included,;
- these goods must originate from a defined area;
- the goods must have qualities, reputations or other characteristics which are clearly linked to the geographical origin of goods.

Why do Geographical Indications matter?

Over the past centuries, European countries have taken the lead in identifying and protecting their Geographical Indications. Many famous GIs today have origins in developed countries, for example, Cognac, Roquefort cheese, Napa Valley wines, Scotch whisky, Sherry, Parmigiano Reggiano, Teruel and Parma hams, Tuscany olive oil, and so on.

However, it would be wrong to conclude that GIs are an instrument for developed countries only. GIs can protect and preserve intellectual property related to traditional cultures, geographical diversity and production methods. All nations have a wide range of local products that correspond to the concept of a GI - think of Basmati rice or Darjeeling tea - but only a few are already known as such or protected globally.

Better protection of GIs can be a useful contribution to increasing income, in particular in rural areas. It also encourages quality production and can promote the development of tourism. GIs grant protection to a community and not to individual right holders.

Since consumers are often ready to pay more for GIs products, people from outside the region may be tempted to appropriate the GI for their own products. This not only misleads consumers, but it also dilute the GI value as well as discourages producers from making investment decisions or launching expensive marketing campaigns.

Consequently gains resulting from marketing GIs need to be accompanied by prevention of their loss of value through copying, or free riding. This requires intense and costly legal efforts that small rural communities can rarely afford. This is why GIs need an enhanced protection. This is something the EU has been pushing for in the ongoing Doha WTO trade negotiations.

[GI Handbook - Introduction](#)

[GI Handbook - Per country](#)