

European case study

Tome des Bauges cheese

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1. History of the initiative

HISTORY OF THE TOME DES BAUGES INITIATIVE

From 1970 to 1985 there was growing awareness of the specificity of the product, but the results of the initial steps taken were unpromising.

In 1970, producers, cheese ripeners and traditional buyers were already aware that Tome des Bauges was a characteristic product, distinct from the Tomme de Savoie. In 1972, a group of farmer-producers from Tome des Bauges registered the trade name Tome des Bauges at the National Institute for Industrial Property (Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle). In theory, the Tome des Bauges label has been protected since that date. However, in terms of creating an image and protecting a quality cheese, registering the trade name did not achieve the results that were expected, for the following three reasons:

1. Legally, the Tome des Bauges brand was not valid because a specification associating a product with its origin cannot be reserved by a company or a group of producers.
2. No system to control the specifications defined by the producers had been established.
3. The producers, farmers and small-scale dairies lacked the means to mature the cheeses, and often sold unripened Tome to retailers, who did not always respect the brand name Tome des Bauges.

This situation continued into the mid-1980s.

From 1986 to 1994 the Tome des Bauges Interprofessional Union was created and the brand name Tome des Bauges received its first official recognition.

In 1986, a group of young producers decided to take the situation in hand. Together they created the Tome des Bauges Interprofessional Union (Syndicat Interprofessionnel). The union brought together the farmer-producers of Tome des Bauges, the cooperatives that collect the milk in the Bauges and the dairies that process the milk within the Massif des Bauges.

The union initiated several procedures aimed at improving the quality and image of Tome des Bauges by:

- researching a precise definition of the traditional characteristics of Tome des Bauges;
- seeking technical advice on cheese production for the producers;
- commissioning the first promotional advertisements for Tome des Bauges;
- investigating improved legal protection for the name Tome des Bauges.

This work was carried out between 1987 and 1990. Between 1990 and 1993, the union's collective work programme was less intense. During this period, the cooperatives, which by the early 1980s numbered 15 with seven production sites, regrouped and restructured themselves. At the end of the 1990s, they modernized the four production sites that were still in existence.

In 1994 the following four factors led to a strong new mobilization of the producers and processors:

1. The new French "quality law" forced the Interprofessional Union to consider new legal protection for the brand name Tome des Bauges, by making registration compulsory under a designation of origin (PDO or PGI), thereby allowing producers to associate the name of the product with the name of a mountain region. From 1985 to 1994, the use of geographical references specific to mountain localities such as Bauges (the name of a mountain massif) in the brand names of agricultural or food products required a previous permit, which Tome des Bauges had already obtained. As a further requirement the quality law specified that only those products whose demand for registration on the

PDO/PGI list had been transferred to Brussels could continue to use specific references to mountain regions.

2. The establishment of a regional nature park, which was to be a means of developing and planning land use, encouraged producers in the Bauges to define their agricultural development strategy.
3. A farmers' association was founded in the Bauges, creating a position for an adviser and coordinator of agricultural projects, which had been lacking for ten years.
4. The Bauges were classified as a fragile rural zone, and as a result were eligible for considerable European Union (EU) funds.

The Tome des Bauges union continued the work required for the registration of the PDO, which was granted in 2002.

2. The product

Tome des Bauges is a ripened cheese traditionally produced in the area of (Les) Bauges.

GEOGRAPHY

The Bauges mountains straddle the departments of Savoie and Haute-Savoie, and form the central part of the northern Pre-Alps. The Bauges mountains are an enclosed limestone massif surrounded by the valleys of the rivers Rhône and Isère and located between Annecy and Chambéry. The massif consists of a high plateau of between 600 and 1 000 m in altitude, surrounded by summits reaching up to about 2 200 m. There are steep spurs on the edge of this high plateau.

The Bauges massif is situated on the edge of the Alps and receives a high annual precipitation of more than 1 400 mm. The altitude is relatively moderate, but the winters are harsh. Snow covers the massif for four to five months every year. The winter temperatures in the valleys often drop to -15 °C.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Agriculture is an important activity in the Bauges. Today, agriculture, tourism and forestry industries are the principal economic resources of the massif. The 14 villages in the heart of the massif, which today have a total population of less than 5 000 inhabitants, numbered up to 23 000 inhabitants at the end of the eighteenth century. Demographic and economic decline began in 1850.

INFRASTRUCTURES AND COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

Because of their steep terrain, and because they are more often bypassed than crossed, the Bauges have long remained isolated from development in the densely populated neighbouring valleys of the Savoie. This has led to the conservation of customs, landscapes and a very specific heritage.

The project was initiated by the producers, but from the very beginning all the activities undertaken in terms of quality control, communication and legal protection brought together a wide range of partners and actors (milk producers, cheese-makers, retailers and ripeners) in a joint programme overseen by the Tome des Bauges Interprofessional Union.

THE TOME DES BAUGES INTERPROFESSIONAL UNION

The union consists of three groups:

- farmer-producers;

- milk collecting cooperatives;
- dairies and ripeners.

Within the union, each group has an equal number of votes shared among its members. It is important to note that:

- the Interprofessional Union brings together all those concerned in developing the product;
- the statutes permit the participation and representation of all members;
- no product distributor or any other structure (professional organization or local community member) belongs to the union;
- it is intentional that the milk producers (through their cooperatives or as farmer-cheese-makers) have a voting majority in the union.

The union employs only one person; a full-time coordinator and cheese technician. A second employee will be hired soon to assist all the operators in their communication and marketing operations. His/her role will be to provide support for the commercial activities of the cooperatives and producers, initially undertaking a market survey and then providing marketing tools. The intention is to maintain this second position for three years. It will be financed for the first two years entirely by voluntary contributions made by professionals from the cheese production sector in both Savoie and Haute-Savoie, which will be pooled in a common fund and redistributed to the producers according to their needs and projects.

Marketing the products of each enterprise (farms, collective maturing cellars for farmers, and private or cooperative dairies) will remain the exclusive responsibility of each enterprise. The union has no responsibility for the marketing of its members' cheeses, but it can provide them with collective help and advice.

In 1987, three dairies and seven farmer-producers joined the Interprofessional Union, accounting for a total production volume of 150 tonnes. At the end of the 1990s, the union comprised four dairies and 25 farmhouse producers, with a production figure approaching 450 tonnes.

FUNDING OF THE INTERPROFESSIONAL UNION

To ensure that resources are sufficient, all the operators have paid contributions to the Interprofessional Union since the beginning of the project, according either to the quantity of milk delivered to a dairy producing Tome des Bauges (in the case of cooperative groups) or to the quantity of Tome des Bauges made (for farmer-producers, dairies and ripeners).

The annual subscription to the Tome des Bauges union is as follows:

- €35 for a farmer-producer;
- €100 for a cooperative or private dairy.

The entry fee, payable once only, is €100 for a farmer-producer, €100 per producer delivering milk to a milk-collecting cooperative, and €1 000 for a private dairy.

The proportional subscription based on the tonnage of Tome des Bauges is €0.13, excluding tax, per cheese of an average of 1.2 to 1.5 kg (i.e. made from 12 to 15 kg of milk). This proportional subscription has almost doubled in five years; it was €0.08 in 1998. Such self-financing contributes in part to the funding of the Tome des Bauges union.

Between 1986 and 1998, the establishment of the collective project benefited from the significant support of departmental organizations concerned with agricultural development, particularly for the partial funding of the union's administrative costs. During this period, the union remained fully in

charge of its activities. As it was both decision-maker and financially responsible, it naturally sought to maximize the public funding available to achieve its aims. The fact that the union and its members were responsible and personally committed to a large extent in the financing of the project has been a key factor (whose importance has been demonstrated on several occasions) in the success of a difficult collective project, in both the medium and long terms.

3. Institutional aspects

PUBLIC SUBSIDIES TO THE INTERPROFESSIONAL UNION'S PROGRAMME

First step in the public financing programmes: 1994–1998

The following is an outline budget for the product, territory, landscape (PTP) programme.

1994 specific expenses incurred under the PTP programme

- Road-signs indicating the production zone: €27 000;
- Communications and advertising: €7 000;
- Legal protection: €7 500;
- **Total: €41 500;**
- Subsidy 5b (national and European funds) 1994: 74 percent.

1995: specific expenses incurred under the PTP programme

- Characterization of the product: €10 000;
- Research into the manufacturing process: €39 000;
- Communications and advertising: €7 500;
- Market survey: €9 000;
- Coordinating activities: €2 000;
- **Total: €67 500;**
- Subsidy 5b (national and European funds): 78 percent.

1997: specific expenses incurred under the PTP programme

- Quality of the product: €8 500;
- Communications and advertising: €10 500;
- Legal protection: €27 000;
- **Total: €46 000;**
- Subsidy 5b (national and European funds): 66 percent.

1998: specific expenses incurred under the PTP programme

- Hygiene: €16 000;
- Subsidy 5b (national and European funds): 75 percent.

1999: specific expenses incurred with the help of another 5b subsidy (agricultural domain, studies, technical assistance, promotion)

- Organization and advice: €30 000;
- Communications: €23 000;
- **Total: €53 000;**
- Subsidy 5b: 80 percent.

In the five years from 1994 to 1998, the Tome des Bauges Interprofessional Union was able to carry out a total relaunch of its project thanks to:

- a high level of mobilization on the part of the producers, who contributed about €23 000 to 30 000 per year to finance their activities; the voluntary subscription for all operators is €5.50 per 100 kg of Tome des Bauges produced;
- the dynamics created by the new regional nature park;
- the considerable financial assistance of European Community (EC) funds: €215 000 towards activities undertaken over six years, with a level of assistance of between 66 and 80 percent. The producers' own financial contribution to the global budget between 1994 and 1998 varied from 28 to 40 percent (average 33 percent), with an average annual budget of €75 000.

Second step in the public financing programmes: 1999–2003

During the period 1 December 1999 to 30 November 2003, the Interprofessional Union committed itself to a Tome des Bauges development programme at a total cost of about €575 000. To that end, it received about €210 000 from the French State, the EC, the Rhône-Alpes region and the department of Savoie – which amounted to about 40 percent of the total.

This has permitted the union to work on:

- experimental technical work, particularly developing the use of traditional fermenting agents in making Tome des Bauges;
- improving knowledge and competence in the sensorial and bacteriological analysis of Tome des Bauges;
- improving quality control in the final stages of maturing.

Support is also available to cattle farmers who convert all or part of their milking herds to the breeds prescribed in the *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) decree: that is, the traditional breeds of Savoie and Haute-Savoie. The decree states that “From 1 January 2012, each herd is to consist of a minimum of 50 percent milking cows of the Tarine and Abondance breeds”.

Finally, the union has received funding to finance the post of administrator, to improve its office and small laboratory equipment and to work towards improving the image of Tome des Bauges through the organization of farmer-producers, communications and checks on the distribution channels. All of these tasks will be undertaken by the person recently employed by the union.

The development programme exists within the framework of a procedure known as the Integrated Programme of Agricultural Development, which was set up in the Rhône-Alpes region and uses various funding resources to support the objectives of a group of producers over a fixed period.

4. Technological and quality aspects

ACTORS INVOLVED IN QUALITY ASPECTS

In mountain regions, the notion of quality is more complex than it is within the more standard agribusiness approach. In industrial transformation, where quality means regularity, variation and diversity in the product are minimized as far as possible by treating the raw material. In mountain environments, on the other hand, studies show that variation and diversity are essential to the richness of taste expected by the consumer as characteristic of a mountain product.

Regarding the techniques chosen by producers, it must be borne in mind that:

- in the mountains, enterprises are small and have limited financial resources;

- the interactions and interdependence among enterprises that share traditional skills are numerous. According to observations, in the face of all kinds of obstacles (whether in the area of quality, commercialization, communications and product image or of legal protection and the defence of operators' interests), solutions can always be found – and this is even more true here than in other areas – in a collective strategy that is based on grouping together, rather than on taking an individual approach.

The work undertaken to define the characteristics of Tome des Bauges involved the advice and supervision of the Scientific Interest Group of the Northern Alps (Groupement d'Intérêt Scientifique [GIS] des Alpes du Nord). Since 1985, the GIS has brought together the National Institute for Agronomic Research (INRA), the National Centre for Agricultural Mechanization, Rural Engineering, Water and Forests (CEMAGREF), the French Technical Institute for Cheeses, and the Chambers of Agriculture of Savoie, Haute-Savoie and Isère, as well as their mountain service (SUACI). The object of the Scientific Interest Group is to support agricultural change in the northern Alps by undertaking research and development on the problems and advantages of the Alpine mountains and their agriculture.

The first phase of the work concerned the characterization and precise identification of Tome des Bauges. To that end, the production practices of farmers and milk collectors were monitored over the summers, autumns and winters of two years. Studies made of each producer resulted in a series of bacteriological, sensorial and physico-chemical analyses of the product.

The second phase of the union's work was to establish a "territorial jury", composed of cheese-makers or ex-cheese-makers, traditional buyers of Tome des Bauges, dairy workers and ripeners of Savoie.

TECHNICAL ADVICE FOR FARMHOUSE PRODUCERS AND CHEESE DAIRIES

The provision of technical advice for farmhouse producers and cheese dairies enabled the first part of the procedure to be completed, namely the precise definition of the traditional characteristics of the product. This led to the establishment of a permanent cheese advisory service for all makers of Tome des Bauges. The advantage of this approach was that it allowed advice to be given that took into account the specific characteristics of the product. This technical support was provided by a cheese technician, who was at first employed by an agricultural development organization, and then directly by the Tome des Bauges union.

The cheese technician working for the union visits all producers at least twice a year for systematic production checks. This system has been in place for the last five years. It will now be adapted in order to motivate the cheese-makers further. Technical advice (which was previously paid for by the union) will be payable by the producers, at least for analyses, and in future will only be given when the producers request it.

5. Economic aspects

The average sale price is €10/kg for an annual average production of 500 tonnes, resulting in €5 million of sales every year, of which one-third is attributable to the farmhouse producers and two-thirds to the cooperatives.

DELIVERY CHAIN

There are two types of enterprise making Tome des Bauges, and each is responsible for the sale of their own products:

- farmhouse producers: 25 to 140 tonnes;
- cheese dairies (private or cooperative): 4 to 310 tonnes.

CHEESE DAIRIES

In the Bauges, there are two types of management for cooperative dairies:

1. in the first type (which is used at two dairies), the producers form a cooperative and sell their milk to an industrial dairy for processing and sale, under a contract of several years and at a price that is renegotiated every year;
2. in the second type (used by two dairies), producers manage production from milking to the finalization of the commercial process. The milk delivered by the producers is paid for according to the financial results. The results of these two cooperative dairies are detailed below.

All four dairies have their own maturing cellars and market a finished product.

Table 1: Cooperative 1 (of type 2)

Number of producers	6
Quantity of milk processed	650 000 kg
Products	Tome des Bauges and a range of dairy products on sale at the shop (other cheeses, butter, cream, Gruyere)
Direct sales at the shop (a wide range of food from the Bauges – wine, goats' cheese, bread, etc.)	63% of total turnover
Price for milk paid to the producer in 2002	€0.45
€440 000 invested in 1999 to set up a shop for direct sales, a visitors' tour and a discovery area (interpretation centre) on the agricultural activities of the Bauges	

Table 2: Cooperative 2 (of type 2)

Number of producers	16
Quantity of milk processed	2 500 000 kg
Products	Tome des Bauges and Gruyere
Direct sales at the shop (a wide range of dairy products made by the dairy or by other associated producers; cow and goats' cheese)	25% in volume 1/3 of total turnover
Price for milk paid to the producer in 2002	€0.44
€1 200 000 invested since 1986 in modernization, adapting the dairy to meet regulations, the construction of cellars, a car park for visitors and a sales point	

Commercially, these two examples clearly illustrate the importance for small units of direct sales in an area for tourism (summer and winter) that is close to large towns (more than 200 000 people live on the edges of the massif). In the case of cooperative 2, other sales form three-quarters of the total volume. These sales go to super- and hypermarkets, hotels and restaurants, the strategy being to reduce risks by limiting the relative weight of each buyer.

We do not have the results for the other two dairies (of type 1), which are managed by private companies. These companies manage several cheese dairies in Savoie and Haute-Savoie, and Tome des Bauges is one of the products in their range that is marketed in super- and hypermarkets countrywide. Nevertheless, owing to its low total tonnage, Tome des Bauges is mainly present at the regional level.

The milk producers of the Bauges have also restructured their dairies, grouping the milk collection cooperatives and choosing to invest in just four of the ten cheese creameries that existed in the Bauges in 1985. Without this rationalization and concentration of investment, all the creameries would have closed.

By protecting their product and improving its quality, the milk and cheese producers are also favouring its best market interests. It is too early to be sure for the Tome des Bauges production zone, but owing to the combination of factors encountered in the wider northern Alps, the dairies have recorded high milk prices. “According to the RICA, the 3 160 professional milk operators in the northern Alps have an average milk quota of 167 000 kg for 1.86 agricultural employees and 62 ha. Highly specialized (milk represents nearly 80 percent of agricultural production), very extensive (1.09 head of cattle per ha of forage) and only slightly indebted (the total of annuities represent 22 percent of the gross profit, as opposed to 38 percent for lowland dairy farms), they benefit from a milk price paid to the producer estimated at €443 per tonne (as opposed to €326 in the Massif Central and lowland areas). ... These operations receive a lower amount of direct aid than their lowland equivalents”.

FARMHOUSE PRODUCERS

The situation of the farmer-producers is very diverse. Ten years ago, the majority of them did not have cellars equipped with temperature and humidity regulation systems for the proper maturation of Tome des Bauges. The commercialization of farmhouse Tome des Bauges was mainly carried out by a number of traditional ripeners in the nearby towns. Unlike most other cheeses, these farmhouse cheeses were not well marketed, and their image was not as strong as that of other cheeses made in dairies. Some of the farmhouse producers have recently organized themselves to invest in a collective ripening room. This will allow them to mature the cheeses properly, but the farmhouse producers involved in the project have not yet established a viable commercial organization.

6. The Protected Designation of Origin of Tome des Bauges

THE PROTECTED DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN IN SAVOY

The *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC), or Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) confines the use of a product's name to the operators situated within a defined zone, who respect the traditional rules of production and who submit to the approved procedures laid out in the decree. The PDO is only accorded at the request of a collective structure that is accessible to all participants in the production zone.

The Bauges are situated in the region of Savoie, where agricultural policy is clearly directed towards the development of products officially designated as “quality” products. Three other cheeses have already been recognized as PDO, Beaufort, Reblochon and Abondance, and this has strongly encouraged other producers in the Massif des Bauges to follow their example.

THE TOME DES BAUGES PDO

In December 2002, Tome des Bauges was recognized as PDO by a decree that was published in the *Journal Officiel*. The PDO guarantees a close link between the product and its regional origins, that is, a geographical zone delimited and defined by natural features (its geological, agronomic and climatic characteristics), human factors and the rules laid down to conserve the natural environment. This notion of region indicates that products originating there cannot be reproduced outside of it.

The work carried out on milk production and processing into cheese has enabled the definition of a set of basic rules that must be respected in order to preserve the traditional skills of the producers of the Bauges massif. In particular, producers must:

- use unpasteurized milk;

- not use mechanical skimming;
- maintain techniques of milk maturation through procedures that aim to mature the milk and develop natural lactic flora for a period varying from several hours to several days;
- limit the use of commercial lyophilized ferments;
- respect certain practices and materials (copper, cheese-cloth, wood) involved in the processing, pressing and turning of the product;
- allow for a minimum maturation of five weeks.

CONTROL ASPECTS OF THE PDO

Every enterprise wishing to make Tome des Bauges cheese, or to produce milk for making Tome des Bauges, must sign a declaration of aptitude, which is a personal and moral commitment to respect the terms of the decree.

The enterprises that make and mature Tome des Bauges are themselves responsible for the classification of their product as PDO. So the enterprises themselves take the primary responsibility.

The Tome des Bauges Interprofessional Union is currently establishing an authentication commission, as has been done for other PDO products. Controls are carried out by two commissions:

1. a conformity commission on production conditions at the farms and dairies;
2. a control commission on the products themselves.

The first commission goes to the production sites to check that the decree is respected. The second one undertakes the tasting of product samples taken from the production sites by the National Institute of Appellations d'Origine (INAO). INAO takes samples of the product before it reaches the distribution system.

The two commissions are authorized, where necessary, to issue warnings and to recommend a temporary withdrawal of the PDO.

The commissions are composed of a majority of professionals, and for the time being do not include the President of the Interprofessional Union (according to a decision of INAO). Controls may be carried out within the distribution chain on the labelling of products.

As far as regulations and the respect of production conditions are concerned, of the hundred or so farms supplying milk to make Tome des Bauges, four cases currently pose a problem because the producers have not signed the declaration of aptitude.

The dairy that collects the milk from these four producers cannot process this milk in the dairy where Tome des Bauges is made. The PDO decree stipulates that all the milk processed in a Tome des Bauges dairy must conform to the decree.

7. Environmental aspects

The production of Tome des Bauges requires the use of local cow breeds, fed on pasture and natural fodder. As a result, it supports the conservation of these local breeds, which would disappear if their lower production yield was not marketed in a way that emphasizes its quality. Extensive breeding systems also affect the conservation of traditional landscapes, with their open spaces and pastureland.

The PDO decree states: “The basic feed of the herd consists of pasture grass during the summer, over a period of at least 120 days, and freely available hay in the winter. The use of dry fodder produced outside the geographical area (as defined for the PDO) as a complement to local produce is authorized

in amounts up to 30 percent of the annual requirement of the farm for the whole herd.” As well as the obvious link with the land, this also indicates a consideration of the need for rural planning and maintenance of land in the Bauges.

8. Cultural and social benefits

The Alps have long remained outside of the great restructuring of the food industries. Bearing this in mind, among the various characteristics of mountain farming, the following points can be highlighted:

- Procedures have often preserved traditional crafts.
- There is considerable variability in any single product, according to season, practices and dairy.
- Sectors are often fragmented, and each involves a large number of operators.
- Each operator produces small volumes within a small operation, with two consequences:
 - from a technical point of view, variations from one producer to another are pronounced (among the 25 farmhouse producers and four cheese dairies that make Tome des Bauges there are five main types of processing procedure);
 - from an economical point of view, financial resources are limited.

For these reasons, we can confirm that in mountain areas – far more than in other areas – the best solutions are to be found in a collective strategy, based on grouping together, rather than on adopting individual approaches.

The producers of Tome des Bauges have organized themselves into an Interprofessional Union, and a framework exists within which they can debate the collective policy for their product and determine collective action aimed at improving its image through research and development, technical advice, collective communication campaigns, etc. The union has also enabled the actors in the Tome des Bauges story to become a credible group in relation to public bodies, local communities and tourist operators who together discuss the economic development of the Massif des Bauges area.

The product is now defined and protected by an official indicator of quality. The name Tome des Bauges can no longer be misappropriated, either by cheeses made outside the Bauges or by cheeses from the Bauges that do not have the recognized traditional qualities. In the past, both forms of misappropriation have been very harmful to the image of the product. The benefits are felt not only in terms of image but also in the preservation of a skill that forms part of the heritage of the Bauges.

9. Sustainability and replicability

FACTORS KEY TO THE PRODUCT’S SUCCESS

It is difficult to say precisely how the present results were achieved (which particular aspect or factor to give prominence to) because they are in fact the result of a series of coherent and complementary actions. What can be noted is that no single factor, not even the legal protection of the PDO, can explain the results obtained. Rather, success is due to a combination of actions undertaken in different domains (technical, legal and marketing) and at different levels – at the core of each enterprise, among the operators in the union and in collaboration with other Savoyard cheese unions – all in the pursuit of quality.

Three important factors should also be highlighted in the story of this initiative:

1. Research and development have been important elements of the work:

- in terms of research, understanding the fundamentals of the traditional fabrication of Tome des Bauges;
 - in terms of development, providing the means of offering support and technical advice to all producers.
2. The basic rules that need to be observed in order to maintain traditional methods have been defined.
 3. The work has been undertaken entirely as a result of the technical and financial responsibility of the producers within their union.

The fact that the union and its members were responsible and personally committed to a significant extent in the financing of the project is a key factor (whose importance has been noted on several occasions) in the success of a difficult collective project, in both the medium and long terms.

In France, for some time now, the term “mountain product” has been equated in the mind of the consumer with the idea of a higher-quality product. As early as 1985, the Chambers of Agriculture of the Northern Alps region (the departments of Savoie, Haute Savoie and Isère) observed that, aside from two products that were well-defined, organized and protected by PDO designation (Beaufort and Reblochon cheeses), mountain products were not really well known even within the region, and they were not organized into groups, nor were they precisely defined and protected.

It was also noted that in mountain regions, the areas where traditional and specific mountain cheeses had fared well were characterized by significant dynamism in terms of the influx of new farmers, and a higher level of image enhancement of dairy products than in other areas.

On the other hand, in mountain areas that concentrated on the production of milk as a raw material for use in the plains in products that were not specifically identified as mountain products, there was the risk that products and agricultural practices disappeared. With the support of the Rhône Alpes region and the State (funds for regional development), the Savoie and Haute-Savoie Chambers of Agriculture have since made it their policy to support collective organizations of operators and the development of traditional mountain products. Since 1986, Tome des Bauges has been part of this programme.

WEAK POINTS

One of the weak points of this kind of project, given that the volume of production will necessarily always be limited because of the restricted area of the production zone, is its difficulty in financing its own operations. The current annual production of 500 tonnes requires annual financing of €45 000 to €50 000 for the activities of the union, which seems a small amount.

One difficulty encountered today is in the marketing of farmhouse cheeses, and the union has decided to allocate funds to help its members in this area. At the moment, farmhouse producers work independently and are not organized to enter either the traditional circuit or the large-scale distribution network, even though the latter is interested in having the full range of PDO products on its cheese counters.

THE IMPACT OF PDO

It is still too early to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the establishment of a PDO. However, it should be noted that aside from the legal protection of the name and the codification of the traditional conventions of product manufacture by defining the conditions that link the product to its territory, the PDO is indirectly a real and effective tool for economic development and land use. While recognition by a PDO is always an important objective for producers, it is not an end in itself.

Economically speaking, the results of the enterprises are always linked to:

- the efforts made to ensure the quality of the milk and its derivatives;
- the investment that allows the cheese to be made and matured in good conditions;
- the investment in marketing the product.

Recognition as a PDO is more than the icing on the cake, however, in that it provides the framework within which economic actors, particularly producers, can organize themselves, with the help of public bodies, to establish conditions that favour a lasting valorization of their product. The positive image of a product is not, however, guaranteed by a PDO; that depends on the form of economic organization and the means adopted by the producers and processors. The PDO makes it possible to avoid lowering the standard of the product, and restricts the area in which the tradition is recognized and protected.