

## **Biodiversity protection and valorization, experiences from Slow Food** *By Cinzia Scaffidi, Slow Food*

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During these more than 20 years of activity Slow Food has got to define the idea of “quality” product with the three adjective of “good, clean and fair”. This means that a quality product must match at the same time all of these requirements:

- it must be good, in terms of taste
- it must be clean, meaning that it should not affect the environment , nor the health of who will eat it or has grown it
- it must be fair in terms of market, and social justice of the producers.

It has been said, in this meeting, that “we distinguish between mass product and quality product”: this may be important because it put on evidence, how the mass production, the industrial one, doesn’t need any link with a territory. More: the industry is disturbed by any obliged link to a place, a traditional process, etc. It only “uses” the idea of local, of territory when it comes about promoting, advertising, because the consumers receive a negative message from the idea that a produces is a “noland” one.

Now: how do the laws behave? They tend to twist, waving between the consciousness of the value of a place and the temptation of a market oriented attitude, which uses the Geographical Indications as empty labels, only aimed to obey the market orders.

Our experience with the Presidia projects (<http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com/eng/presidi/lista.lasso>) shows how the place is a central issue in the definition of excellence of a product, not only for the historical and productive links, but even for the mere individuation of a product to be part of one of our project.

When we talk of quality of a produce linked to a territory, we have to consider that the link is a very important part of the quality. And the local consumers and producers are the most trustable judges of that quality because they and only they have the parameters, the experiences and the terms of comparison needed to understand if a local product is good or not.

Some times the presidia products had problems with the Geographical Indications. Just to mention two opposite situations, problems can happen when there is no protection and when there is too much protection, or at least a bad protection, the empty labels we were talking about.

When there is no protection there is a risk, for the producers who start a successful production of a traditional food: if it works, in terms of market, the industry will be very quick in launching a “trade mark” product with that name (but of course without those characteristics). In this case the winners are normally the lawyers: to recuperate a traditional name which had no protection and has been misused by the industry is of course possible, but very expensive. Often the local producers decide to renounce.

When the protection is badly built, as in the case of some DOP, discipliners do not respect the local and traditional way of production, and create a weird situation in which the ones who want to keep producing in the “true” way must choose between being in the DOP, without any possibility to distinguish their production from the industrial one, or being out of the DOP, meaning without any kind of promotion and protection.

The problem is that the GI should not become a brand! They have to help linking a product to its territory following the rules of consistency, and common sense.

When the GI become a brand, then we have the problems of imitations: if we could set up a shared system of GI, valid all over the world, in which all the GI could have the same level of dignity, because all the territories have cultures and products to improve and promote, there would be no meaning in imitating Parmesan or Camembert.

But if the Italian Bresaola IGP can be produced with Brazilian meat, where is the consistency, the promotion of the territory? Why the Brazilians should not learn how to make Bresaola from their animals and sell it under a similar name, if the Italian one has market success and no true protection?

The challenge is to create a tool which has to build standards but referring itself to a living system, which is – for its same nature – continuously changing; a system of standards which must defend diversity. It is not easy. But that is the central issue.

We are trying to get there with another project in defense of biodiversity, a vegetal open source where we want to describe landraces seeds from the genetic, gastronomic, ritual, historical and whatever else point of view. This project has been put recently on the web: [www.granos.it](http://www.granos.it), so that it can be shared and improved by an extended collaboration.

Maybe this way to proceed can be a model also for getting to a definition of GI than can match the needs of all the territories.