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Qualifying the Corsican cheeses as pastoral products: Issues for market mediations

Jean Michel Sorba¹ and Melissa Ait Mouloud²

¹ *Laboratoire de Recherche sur le Développement de l'Élevage - SAD-Corte INRA*

² *UMR - MOISA - Montpellier SupAgro INRA*

Abstract: Pastoralism has been discredited for a long time on the grounds that it would harm the agrarian activities. Today, it is generally acknowledged that pastoralism has positive qualities due to the grazing by herds of spontaneous resources. Pastoralism has become a matter of public interest because pastoral systems are low inputs, environment-friendly and are associated to tradition. However, the products from this type of activities do not have a real economic benefit of this turnaround. The paper analyses the possibilities to qualify the Corsican cheeses as "pastoral products," taken for an ideal-type, to understand how and to what extent the professionals of the market act to translate the pastoral features of insular cheeses. A survey conducted among producers and users of cheeses (restaurateurs, specialty retailers and prescribers) in the island and outside (Languedoc and Provence) has identified: What are the components of the Corsican system (local breed, flock management and forage resources) taken for "pastoral features" and associated with insular cheeses? At what extent these components have been incorporated and "trauced" by the markets, with what similarities and differences in Corsica and outside the island?

Firstly, we have developed the several components of the pastoralism in the island mobilized by breeders and by the others actors involved. Secondly, we have considered how the sales agents have developed commercial arguments and how describe cheeses locally and outside the island. From these results, operational ways to incorporate the production conditions in qualifying the cheeses on the market are proposed. Finally, to highlight the nature of Corsican pastoral cheeses we propose two ways for qualifying them: (i) an associative logic in which market mediations connect productive practices - pastoral functions - to consumption practices and (ii) a dissociative logic for which products are de connected to the from their production conditions.

Keywords: Pastoralism, pastoral product, mediations, associative logic, dissociative logic

Introduction

Pastoralism has been disqualified for a long time on the grounds that it would have harmed the other agricultural activities. Today, its several ecological, economic and socio – cultural qualities are recognized. Due to its environmentally positive attributes, non costly light inputs, often associated with "tradition", pastoralism becomes more and more a subject of public interest. The experts hold grazing of spontaneous rangelands by outdoor mobile herds as a distinctive characteristic of the pastoral systems. Among several reported qualities, we note the preservation of productive areas and their biodiversity (Agreil et al, 2010), the existence of a complex know-how to manage the systems which implies high capacities (Meuret, 2010) and in Southern countries a significant contribution to food security for local populations (Faye and Duteurtre 2009). Despite this positive requalification by public authorities (Dubeuf and al., 2013), and this image reversal,

the producers do not get still much benefits. The commercial return of the enhancement of pastoral conditions is still rare and not yet stabilized.

Starting from the sheep and goat pastoralism and cheeses in Corsica, this article explores the reasons why these returns are not developed. Our objective is to study the conditions for qualifying the cheeses of the island as "pastoral product", this concept being used as an ideal – type. Despite deep recent changes, especially in the use of spontaneous resources and the increasing use of food supplementation, the Corsican pastoralism remains in fact the reference model for all breeders of the island. But like in other regions, this strong pastoral inscription does not lead to a specific valuation of the local cheese production.

The analyzed data are both the formal scholarly definitions of pastoralism by livestock advisors and experts and the common definitions of the local Corsican producers. These definitions are then faced with the practical and commercial statements associated with the sale of cheeses in Corsica but also in Provence and Languedoc-Roussillon.

The first part of the article identifies the main distinctive characteristics of the Corsican pastoralism by experts. A second part discusses the initiatives and commercial arguments used to describe and qualify cheeses locally and outside the island. Finally, the article explores in a third part the commercial conditions for marketing a specifically existing "pastoral cheese" produced in Corsica and opens ways forward for establishing connections between pastoral practices and the use of cheeses on the market. The authors distinguish associative logics in which the actors of qualification, including market professionals, provide a continuity of relations between the productive practices and uses of cheeses (Cochoy and Dubuisson- Quellier , 2000) and dissociative logics for which the products are disconnected from their production conditions (Michon *et al.*, 2011).

Materials and methods

The elements of the Corsican livestock system (breed, herd management, food resources etc.) considered as pastoral are compared with their market translations in Corsica and outside the island. The methodology is based on the specifications and practical means (labels, points of sales and information means, restaurant menus) mobilized to incorporate the conditions of production to qualify cheeses on their markets.

The methodology includes a first axis to:

- Identify indicators used by farmers from the concrete implementation of farming practices and their interpretation. Ten farm-made cheese producers, six with sheep and four with goats, equally divided in lowland / foothill and mountain areas, have been interviewed.
- Identify indicators developed and mobilized by the extension agents and advisors: The purpose of the interviews was to identify indicators and categories of farming systems mobilized to advise the farmers. The 8 interviewed agents are employees of professional organizations, Chambers of Agriculture and public institutions working for the management of local breeds, livestock management, co ordination of support activities, experimentation and research.
- Identify from three typologies developed over the past 30 years variables qualified as pastoral by experts, researchers and engineers working on small ruminant activities. The first type is the result of a comprehensive survey of sheep and goat units in Corsica undertaken in 1991 by the Laboratory for Research on Livestock Development located in Corte, Corsica (INRA, Science for Action and Development). The second one was developed ten

years later in 1999 by the French Livestock Institute. The third one was undertaken in 2011 by a consultant on request of the Corsican interprofessionnal Dairy Sheep and Goat Association (ILOCC).

The 3 typologies of small ruminant units in Corsica

Typology 1991 INRA		Typology 1999 French Livestock Institute		Typology 2011 (Abso Conseil Consulting)	
Sheep	Goats	Sheep	Goats	Sheep	Goats
Productivist Breeder	Settled breeder	Pastoral forage crops	Pastoral traditional	Breeders on rangelands few feedstuffs supplementation	Not managing breeders, favored conditions
Forage breeder	« Corsican model » shepherd »	Pastoral with feed stuffs and forage purchase		Breeders on rangelands with supplementation	Not managing breeders, Low favored conditions
Poly- cheese processing breeder	Alpine goat breeder	Pastoral traditional	Pastoral with forage crops	breeders with forage and few crops	managing breeders pastoral rangelands
Picker shepherd	Picker shepherd	New lowland breeders		breeders with forage and crops	Opportunistic and productivist (not with the Corsican breed)
Dynamic shepherd					

A second focus of the methodology is to:

- Identify from commercial devices, what references the market professionals mobilize to qualify the cheeses produced in Corsican farms. From this point of view, a label is considered as a medium for commercial communication. A semiotic analysis is performed on 150 labels of Corsican cheeses. The data come from a survey conducted with 27 restaurants, 20 specialty shops of the island and 8 cream and cheese shops in two French Southern regions (Languedoc and Provence). Twenty four of these facilities were located in Corsica and 23 in mainland France.
- Pull out the production practices valued on the markets (and those who are not) from business practices, prescriptions and arguments concerning the sale and consumption of products.

Results and Discussion

The definitions of the Corsican pastoralism

The Corsican pastoralism as defined by the shepherds

The indicators used by farmers to define the Corsican pastoralism are presented here. These indicators are classified according to the citation frequency (CF) in the corpus of interviews.

- The local sheep and goats breeds and rangelands are used by all farmers (but without indications about the part of rangelands in the total ration).
- The know-how about herd management is mobilized by two thirds of breeders.
- Transhumance, the type of activities and labour sharing between herd management and cheese processing are quoted by more than half the farmers.
- Finally, food supplementation, the importance of grassland areas and monitoring of herds are indicators of pastoralism for less than one third of farmers.

The interviews show that the axis sedentarity - nomadism that has structured for a long time the definition of pastoralism in the island has been complemented by four other categories of indicators. We observe that the local breed and the use of rangelands have been always mentioned a pastoral indicator, while grassland management and the monitoring of herds are quoted by a minority.

The definition of indicators mobilized by extension agents

The extension agents highlight two types of indicators to capture the reality of island farms.

The first category is made up from the image of the "pastoral breeder". This cluster is characterized by the extensive grazing of transhumant herds always outdoor, using rangelands on itineraries mobilizing the expertise of shepherds, the cultivated grass areas being limited.

The second category is typed by the "forage breeder" controlling agricultural knowledge, the creation and maintenance of natural and sown pastures but with a limited use of rangelands or not using them.

Most Corsican farms are located between these two poles. Farms corresponding point by point to these two categories are rare due to the sharp decline in transhumance and the common use of rangelands.

In this construction, the intensity of complementation (IC) and the degree of mechanical intervention in pastoral areas (TP) are mobilized to distinguish the position of farms between these two poles.

In addition, for most of the extension agents, small ruminant farms in Corsica differ from continental ones according to the following dualities: herd observation versus herding; closed "maquis" versus scrub; local breeds versus highly productive ones: rangelands versus meadows; outdoor versus stall; herd management versus animal care; supplementation versus rationing.

Thus, the opinions of the technicians on the definition of pastoral farms in Corsica are particularly mixed. There is no stable and unambiguous definition of pastoral farms from the interviews. And these definitions appear more precise when the Corsican sheep and goat farms are compared to continental systems.

The definitions of pastoralism according to typologies from experts

The first typology (INRA, 1991) made a comprehensive survey on the production and collection systems". 6 types of sheep units and four types of goat units were defined. The variables used to build the typologies of the sheep and goats farms are: labour, herd management, equipment and buildings, power production. The reference to pastoralism is a key indicator of the cluster construction.

The structure of the typology opposes the image of "the forage breeders" to this of "the picker shepherd"; it is related to the use of the rangelands, herd mobility and the level of equipment (livestock and farm equipment building). The group "poly- cheese processing breeder " focuses on processing activities without mentioning the characteristics of the products themselves. We can note that goat units are all considered as pastoral farms.

The second typology (French Livestock Institute, 1999) was undertaken 10 years later, using equivalent variables; the authors give a higher place to land situation, the trajectory of farms as well as the social aspects of farms. Two groups referred to pastoralism with or without purchased external feeding. Once again pastoralism is mentioned but is generally described by default and not qualified precisely. The only precise mentions are the pastoral know-how. In this typology, a more explicit reference is given to the destination of milk, cheese processing and coupling the breed with the PDO Brocciu cheese.

The third typology (AbsoConseil, 2011) has been oriented more on the type of valuation of the grassland and forage resources in terms of cost variables and indicators of business performance. The reference to pastoralism has disappeared in the construction of the typology. We can note that "complementation" is associated with "rangelands" to define its two major types. While in the two first typologies "fodder" is associated to "sower", "rangelands" is the variable used to define pastoralism, in this typology; farmers using rangelands are grouped here with those using supplements. Regarding the goat sector, the typology is reduced to "favourable" or "not favourable" to define the environment on physical criteria (slope) and the possibilities of mechanization (rotary slushing, "gyrobroyage") to provide an access to the herbaceous resources.

Indicators of pastoralism in Corsica included in typologies

We have seen that in the first typologies, pastoralism was included to build the first types but has disappeared in the following ones. We note that in all three cases:

- Knowledge related to the use of the term does not structure the typology. The type "picker shepherd" tends to weaken the know-how about management reduced to monitoring.
- The rangelands are described by default as the support and for the "natural availability" of the herbaceous resources.
- The relationship between selected variables and characteristics of the products are not mobilized in the cluster construction.

Finally, we observe that the last typology ordered by the Inter professional Association (ILLOCC) no longer holds the pastoral as a descriptive category of the Corsican livestock activities. Natural grazing on rangelands has been associated with the intensity of supplementation. Rangelands becomes the "pastoral signature" but also the expression of a feeding dependence.

Identifiers, media and merchandising practices for Corsican cheeses

The commercial identifiers of the Corsican pastoralism

In the absence of certification, the reputation of the shepherd cheese has been long enough to establish a relationship of trust between local producers and consumers. We can presume that close relationships and local acquaintance, the importance of direct sales and the visibility of the

(outdoor) herds are still perceived as adequate by the client to identify the conditions of production and hence the authenticity of the product.

So, most of the brands emerged from a proliferation of patronymics to name the cheeses. Marketing of both farm made and industrial cheeses in Corsica is based today almost exclusively on a brand policy. The reference to Corsica (and its variations), associated to their local names are the major identifiers of the cheeses of the Island. For twenty years, thanks to the dynamism of the farm-made cheese producers, "casgiu casanu", the farm made cheese became also an identifier of the island cheeses.

The commercial supports of the Corsican cheeses

The semiotic analysis of labels shows that the most frequent mention after the cheese maker is the animal origin of milk, here, sheep, goats or "sheep and goat mixed milk (63 %), then raw milk or pasteurized terms (61 %) and the usual denomination to identify Corsica (53%). Among them, scrub (21%) and the Corsican villages (18%) are the most cited.

The identifiers of cheeses on labels are about the technology used (13 %) (soft, washed rind cheese, uncooked pressed the type of processing (farm made or not (11%), tradition (10%) and taste. The image of the shepherd is present on 10% of labels. Iconography is about Corsica and its variations (the village, the traditional barn), the shepherd, the ewe or the goat grazing in the scrubs or the rangelands; some others are more anecdotic (scenes of manual milking, Corsican women). The information about the production area or the local name of cheeses are rare but increasing according to the interviewed Corsican restaurants).

The messages sent by the restaurants on their websites are generally poor. Nevertheless, some of them give details about the origin and the production system but they are still scarce and not precise. Besides, there are few references about this information which cannot be checked. It is worse when a continental restaurant gives some information about Corsican cheeses.

With few exceptions, menus are presented to the customers without information about the origin and processing of cheeses

Labels and brands are the only tangible signs of the product in specialty shops. But they are far from being present when the product is offered to customers.

On the Continent, operators say they do not need to make any special effort to sell the cheeses of Corsica. Their SEO of the Corsican cheeses is an answer to propose a diversity of cheeses. Information is provided passively on the customer's request. In the restaurants, the cheeses from Corsica are proposed only as elements of the Corsican gastronomy in special menus and without any other qualification. This lack of prescription could be explained by the type of market of the Corsican cheeses. An important part of the customers are from the Corsican community and are expected to know the typical qualities of cheeses; so the seller does not seek non Corsican clients. Everything happens as if no marketing would be needed.

Some interviewed professionals mentioned also some non Corsican clients who would like to remember their holidays in Corsica, a souvenir in short. In this case, although they are generally not from Corsican origin but either they consider they know the local cheeses as the islanders themselves, either the seller considers they know their qualities.

Poor arguments

The production of Corsican cheeses is insufficient to meet a growing demand and our survey near the commercial professionals has revealed a disconnection between the qualification of cheeses on the markets and the pastoral practices. In Corsica, the lack of definition and reference seems to be partly compensated by local supplies what is possibly offset thanks to local relationships.

On the Continent the restaurateurs mobilized almost no reference on how to produce milk or process cheeses, Only the professional specialized cheese sellers seem to be more careful to the conditions of production and to the producer "behind the cheese."

However, while in Corsica, the production factors are more enhanced and more diversified (flocks, mountains, shepherds, breeds) the cheese sellers in urban areas are more focused on the figure of the producer and the use of raw milk.

The taste of the cheese has been quoted although it was not much communicated or very incompletely. In Corsica, taste is essentially related to "feeding resources" and in this case, the scrubs and the "maquis" are quoted. Using raw milk is not really considered as a quality factor but we did not identify why.

According to continental operators, customers are looking for "quality products" they assimilate to local farm products. Everything happens as if buying a farm made "terroir" cheese would be enough by itself in the specialty shops. Paradoxically, the quality of cheeses would be attached to the "natural" quality of the island and in this sense is rather generic. Thus, this quality would not be assessed and not assessable.

But if we come back on the customers, the question of origin is recurrent. For continental customers, the origin is placed under the sign of uncertainty "are these cheeses from Corsica".

In specialty shops, the customers need different advices. The customer here is no longer in a passive position as he is captive client when he is facing the restaurateur. In a shop, "taste" appears more important but we do not know much what this word means as the word "quality".

Selection criteria: many stereotypes for invisible production activities

The selection criteria of the restaurants and speciality cheese shops in Corsica are different from those of the continent. These criteria have to be connected with the absence of a real sales pitch by the suppliers. The assessment of products is almost exclusively based on experience, which limits prescription and information on production conditions.

The survey highlights the very low level of communication of the producers, or its low efficiency when it exists. In fact, most restaurateurs or speciality shops, meet their suppliers by "word of mouth ". In this context, continental operators have in fact much difficulty to find good cheeses from Corsica.

Such a situation encourages the construction and circulation of stereotypes (Giraud et al , 2012), already present on the labels. These fixed labels disadvantage change and the establishment of specification about production conditions. Thus, the cheeses are associated with simplified and reductive references (the island flag, the design of the island, the figure of the shepherd, tourist landscapes).

What is the importance of the production conditions in the qualification of cheeses?

The contrasted definitions of pastoralism are disconnected from the qualification of cheeses

We have seen that the analysis of the three livestock typologies developed in the last twenty years highlighted the criteria of instability for the definition of pastoralism and the non-inclusion of specific characteristics of cheeses in the market.

Typologies studied tend to reduce the use of pastoralism to rangelands and local breeds. Is the pastoral breeder a passive user of the available pastoral resource as it can be suggested by the denomination "picker shepherd" (first type)? Does the "pastoral shepherd" become more dynamic when he will sow grasslands and become a "forage breeder" (2nd type)? Should the professionals give up the word "pastoral" to become deliberately "a breeder under low favoured conditions" forced into a more or less high level of supplementation (3rd type). Depletion definitions of pastoralism also coincide with the absence of a qualification of the Corsican cheeses. No local cheeses have integrated these definitions. Everything happens as if the milk products would not be related to any use. Beyond the ambiguity of the definition of pastoral farms in Corsica is the lack of a definition of pastoral cheeses.

How then rethink the place of the "shepherd's cheese" and make possible the existence of a market for pastoral products?

This article has provided some answers on why the several ways to produce milk are decoupled from the commercial existence of cheeses:

- The identity of pastoralism in Corsica is blurred by the extension agents
- The instability of the several categories of pastoralism and the absence of a unified technical type
- The lack of commercial intermediation built on stabilized productive categories
- The strength of stereotypes about Corsican cheeses.

These elements interfere against the necessary arrangements to build the markets.

However, if we compare the indicators mobilized by the producers to those used by market operators, it is possible to link them.

The local breed is very present in the definitions of producers and advisors but the restaurateurs and retailers enhance rather the specie (sheep and goat). The scrub can be considered as a convenient substitute of rangelands which is at the heart of professional definitions as we have seen it above. While raw milk is a strong anchoring of the pitch quality, it is not central in Corsica and in the definitions of pastoralism. And cheese processing is not quoted as a pastoral component as defined by breeders. At reverse, the commercial operators enhance cheese technology. This point is not surprising since the milk is not mentioned in the definitions of pastoralism provided by farmers.

Conclusion

The structural components of the Corsican pastoralism and its identity have faced deep changes as the decrease of transhumance and active shepherding. What new references are needed to rebuild pastoralism in the island. Research has shown that an unique and clear pastoral model does not exist; and that the commercial identity of cheeses is dissociated from the production practices.

It suggests that the qualification of Corsican cheeses as a "pastoral product" could only be built by aligning executive's definition used between production and marketing.

In this perspective, the qualification of milks for Corsican cheeses could be a support for establishing effective and sustainable commercial mediations between pastoral practices and the uses of marketed cheeses .

The objective of this research was to identify the qualities attributed to Corsican cheeses by market operators and among these qualities those related to the components of productive skills and particularly of pastoral production conditions.

The results showed the weakness of the qualification of Corsican cheeses and the lack of a clear definition of pastoralism in the island. Unsurprisingly, the qualities of the Corsican cheeses are reduced to stereotypes outside the island and to relationships of mutual close acquaintance within the island. As a result, the link between the product and the bases of its origin, the pastoral production practices are far from being ensured. The productive and commercial frameworks are mismatched which reflects a dissociative process. By this process, the sequences of development (definition, stabilization, assessment) and the mediations to articulate them have traduced imperfectly the valorization of labor, for each operator involved in the value chain (Michon, 2011).

Such a situation encourages the construction and circulation of stereotypes which disadvantage the establishment of effective and sustainable commercial mediations specifications for linking pastoral conditions with milk characteristics. To qualify these cheeses and for their development, the actors involved in the definition of policy frameworks must decide what is pastoral in the island. Thus, the operators and commercial actors will be able to participate in the constitution and the development of "insular pastoral cheeses" to participate and initiate an associative process.

Presently, although the demand is high, the Corsican cheese remains not well known and argued by operators, which reduce its specific value its pastoral characteristics in favour of the single "Corse" (Corsica) denomination only.

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