



On 28 May 2021, spiritsEUROPE organised the conference “Tradition and Transition: Sustainability at the Heart of Geographical Indications”. Close to 100 participants representing the EU’s institutions, Permanent Representations to the EU as well as producers of GI food products and spirit drinks came together for 2.5 hours to discuss how the GI products’ traditionally sustainable mode of production can be further strengthened and which role EU policy can play. Central to the discussions was the question how the highest level of consumer information can be ensured and how consumers’ growing demand for thorough, all-encompassing information about the products they purchase can be successfully addressed. *“Meeting consumer expectations in terms of sustainability is good for business”* states Morag Garden, Head of Sustainability and Innovation at the Scotch Whisky Association.

The conference guests agreed with MEP Irene Tolleret, who summarised: *“Consumers do not always differentiate geographical indications*

*from non-quality products. European logos are not easily recognised by citizens. Consumers need to be better informed about Geographical Indications and about the efforts made by producers to improve their sustainability performance. Geographical Indications should improve their ability to convey their image of high-quality products.”* In this context, digital labelling is a promising yet to date not sufficiently recognised means to reach consumers effectively at the point of purchase. Conference participants across GI products will continue the exchange of best practice examples with the support of the hosting organisation spiritsEUROPE, who is developing a bespoke e-label platform to provide consumers with the information they seek via QR codes and barcodes in close cooperation with the wine sector, CEEV.

The presentation by Maria Iusco of the European Commission’s DG AGRI formed a central part of the conference. DG AGRI’s GI unit is currently developing a legislative proposal, to be issued by the end of 2021, on



how the sustainability in GI products can be officially recognised and strengthened. To put it in Maria's words: "The EU GI schemes are important vehicles for delivering sustainable production. GIs are intrinsically linked to the natural environment and place social factors at the forefront. The challenge ahead of us is how to make producers' commitments more visible and the GI policy even more sustainable."

In addition, Maria stressed the delicate balancing act of introducing sustainability aspects into traditional production methods. Conference speakers Jasna Čačić from the Croatian Drinks Association and Valery Elisseeff from PDO Comté cheese in France acknowledged the challenges as well as the potential that lies with GIs.

To say it in the words of Massimo Vittori, Director of oriGIn, "While sustainability can be considered one of the top challenges of our times, with moral and commercial implications for businesses and consumers, some of the core GIs values – such as local development, preservation of tradition, value chain governance, independent controls and traceability – respond to some of those major concerns. The EU Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy represent an opportunity for GIs to better communicate such values as well as to make additional efforts to respond to emerging "societal demands."

spiritsEUROPE is looking forward to organising a follow-up conference on GIs and

2 June 2021 - CP.MI-174-2021 sustainability in the course of 2021, taking to heart the call of Commission President von der Leyen to European Commissioner Wojciechowski, when she invited him to look at "ways to strengthen the system of geographical indications... our cultural, gastronomic and local heritage is preserved and certified as authentic across the world". The conference participants look forward to cooperating with the EU Commission and sharing century-old practices that are indeed sustainable and take account of and care for the *terroir*.



👉 Click [here](#) to access all presentations

👉 The 240 spirits GIs in Europe:

<https://spirits.eu/geographical-indications>



👉 Continue the discussion on Twitter @spiritsEUROPE

