

Walserstolz – Cheese from the Biosphere Region, Austria

Markus Schermer, University Innsbruck

Aims of the initiative:

The main objective of the initiative is to raise the milk price for the participating farmers by selling a premium product not only directly in the valley but on national and international markets together with a professional marketing partner

Main Activities:

The initiative operates a joint maturing cellar, and sells the matured cheese under a common label (Walserstolz). The “green” cheese is produced in dairies or on alpine summer farms and then transported to the common maturing facility at the market partner. There the cheese is branded “Walserstolz” by the marketer.

Starting Year:

1996, after Austria joined the EU, the initiative was started to battle the declining producer price for milk



Actors involved:

The initiative assembles three local cooperative dairies in the region „Großes Walsertal“ in the Austrian province of Vorarlberg.

About 150 farmers are members of these primary cooperatives

Walserstolz integrates an association of the three village dairy cooperatives and a commercial cheese ripener who acts also as a wholesaler.

Besides these market actors, the UNESCO Biosphere Park „Großes Walsertal“ is a major regional partner.

Aspects that make Walserstolz particular interesting:

- The cooperation between framers, three dairy cooperatives and one business partner operates jointly a maturing cellar
- The cheese marketer owns the brand and controls quality in mutual trust
- The close cooperation between the initiative and the UNESCO Biosphere Park provides scope for synergies



Performance:

Market: Walserstolz has successfully positioned itself in the market for mountain cheese within Austria.

The producers receive a higher price of about 10% for the milk regardless of the marketing possibilities.

Local dairies sell Walserstolz at competitive rates in their shops, as the business partner charges them only the costs of maturing without any profit margin.

Social: The initiative fosters family farming. The positive feedback, also from consumers from outside of the valley, contributes to the self esteem of farmers and the local population in general.

Cultural: Walserstolz is strongly embedded in the local Walser tradition. The initiative helps to strengthen the culinary tradition in the valley in cooperation with local gastronomy.

Environmental: the small scale dairy production systems are encouraged by the initiative. Within the Biosphere reserve the initiative is a showcase for sustainability, a joint information centre is planned.

Political: The initiative is well netted in local and regional politics. This helped to mobilise financial support in the start up phase

