



MOVING
MOUNTAIN VALORISATION THROUGH
INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND GREEN GROWTH

Policy Brief

CENTRAL APENNINES | Alto-Molise Dairy Value Chain



Photo credit: Giorgio Paglione



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Central Apennines: Alto-Molise Dairy Chain

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Summary

Dairy production historically characterises the Central Apennines. Woodland and pastures are natural resources, interwoven with local cultural traditions linked to transhumance from inner areas of the Apennines to coastal zones and the South of Italy. The value chain (VC) under analysis has successfully enhanced traditional dairy production (such as the Caciocavallo cheese) by sustainably exploiting livestock and pastures, and establishing fair contracts/relations with local livestock breeders. The processor uses cultural tradition related to mountain farm production in its marketing strategies. It has also been able to enter high-value market segments, such as haute cuisine restaurants and the slow-sustainable tourism sector. The processor is one of the oldest cheesemakers in the area, and it has continued to innovate in its strategies along almost three centuries of cheese production. For this reason, this VC seems particularly worthy to be analysed in the context of the Central Apennines Mountain Reference Region (MRR).

Know more about the Central Apennines Reference Region, its selected value chain and the regional multi-actor platform (MAP), [here](#).

Key policy messages

- Involvement
- Participation
- Social Innovation

1. The Mountain Reference Region (MRR)

The Mountain Reference Region (MRR) of Central Apennines comprises hills and mountains, with a few valleys with rivers and streams. In the most extreme southern area of the MRR, which extends over the northern zone of Molise Region, several natural areas are located. Here there is a rich biodiversity, and some tree species are considered rare, like the Apennines white fir woods. For this reason, a site in Alto Molise has been declared a UNESCO biodiversity reserve since 1977 (the Collemeluccio-Montedimezzo reserve, see [here](#) UNESCO reference and [here](#) the institutional page). It is the only UNESCO site in the Central Apennines.



This context is also characterised by extensive pastures and wooded areas involved in the mountain economy, such as livestock (cheese and meat) and forestry-related products (wood, honey, and truffles). There is also a tradition of craftsmanship linked to the steel industry (i.e. “Fonderia Martinelli”, production of bells) and confectionery (e.g. “Confetto riccio di Agnone”).

In short, a balanced relationship between the traditional human activities (livestock breeding and craft activities) and the natural context is recorded and, in this scenario, the dairy activities are worth examining to understand the territory's resilience, sustainability, and socioeconomic development.

2. Dairy Resilience & Innovation

The main actor in this value chain is a cheesemaking family whose activity dates back to 1662. One of their relevant productions is the typical local cheese (designed by the Ministry of Agriculture as one of the “traditional food products”, acronym: P.A.T.) called “Caciocavallo of Agnone”. More details in The ERSA (Regional Rural Development Agency) list of Molise traditional dairy food ([document in Italian](#)).

The production cycle is performed using only local raw materials (milk), establishing fair economic collaboration with local breeders. Breeders supply the milk according to high quality and environmental sustainability standards supported by the “Di Nucci” company. The relations between the milk producers and the cheese factory are not only economic, but also based on common values. This favours socioeconomic development and environmental quality of the mountain area, preserving cultural traditions, natural resources, and landscape. In their marketing strategy, “Di Nucci” stresses the link between the cheese factory with Alto Molise's cultural and rural tradition (like the practice of transhumance) and supporting sustainable development initiatives.

The company has also a clear vocation for internationalisation, oriented towards the *haute cuisine* sector and experiential tourism (e.g. dairy crafts museum), to improve their business by taking into account (through its value chain) the socioeconomic and ecological context.

In this perspective, the value chain promotes not only a possible development path by innovating production and marketing strategies, but also supports resilience actions in the territorial context.



3. Value chain contribution to sustainability and resilience of the MRR: barriers and opportunities

Milk production in mountain pastures is a centuries-old traditional activity. It established a sustainable relationship between exploiting natural resources, and the needs of human communities in the territory within a specific culture (e.g. the culture of transhumance). Central Apennine societies have therefore contributed to the management of forests and water basins essential for downstream activities and ecosystem services. The rise of industry disrupted this balance, favouring rural depopulation with a consequent worsening of the relationship between man and nature in the Apennines context. The value chain is a good example of traditional production innovated for the contemporary market, which allows the population to persist in rural areas. This makes it possible to develop or maintain a virtuous relationship between nature and man, with both local and systemic economic and environmental advantages. In short, the value chain enables the development of resilient initiatives to contemporary challenges (environmental, economic, etc.).

Using national and European funding is a possible opportunity to develop and support these initiatives and to replicate best practices. At the same time, the complex procedures for accessing European funding, and the need to identify elements of innovation in response to contemporary challenges, are limitations to meeting the need to acquire skills that are not adequately present among the actors in this context.

4. Policy relevant considerations

The valorisation and preservation of the dairy value chain crosses interests at different scales. At a local level, it contributes to reducing negative trends (e.g. depopulation and loss of historical and cultural heritage in the inland areas of the Central Apennines). At the regional and interregional level, the development and innovation of dairy and livestock farming practices can activate positive economic circuits (above all farm experiential tourism). They involve several actors, territories, and sectors (such as rural and sustainable tourism linked to transhumance routes). Understanding the virtuous relationship between economic activities and the socio-ecological system is relevant for resilience and sustainability strategies at a broader level.

Policies should support territories that present the elements mentioned above. They can reduce negative trends (depopulation, ageing population, degradation due to the lack of care for the forest, historical and cultural heritage, etc.) and support current (social and technological) innovation processes. A lower tax burden for residents and improved access to digital (broadband, 5G) and physical (roads, railways) infrastructures seem essential aspects to consider. Access to services (health, education, etc.) is another aspect to consider.





Policies should also improve the innovation processes of farms by fostering the widespread dissemination of technical innovations and economic diversification opportunities, such as agri-tourism, rural tourism, energy production, and ecosystem services.

The analysis of the value chain allows us to understand how socio-cultural and environmental elements can be used to improve the sustainability and resilience of human communities to face challenges like climate change.

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