

Geographical Indications and Thai-Italian Cooperation

Branding strategies centering on the geographical origins of a product can provide a basis for differentiating commodity products. The use of such “geographical indications”(or GIs) can involve unique quality characteristics associated with a particular location or quality images that are based on the history, tradition, and folklore in a region.

Geographical Indication is an Intellectual Property. They are names or marks used with products that link them to their origins and the intellects of their long pasts, whether in Thailand or other countries. Thus when a product is said to be “original” or “genuine” as accepted by general consumers, such product will remind consumers of their origins. For example, in Thailand, delicious pomelos should be from Nakornchaisri, salted eggs from Chaiya. An Italian is Parmesan cheese, one of the oldest Italian cheeses, developed about 2000 years ago in the castled city of Parma.

It is the culinary tradition of that location that has enabled it to build its reputation. The same is true for Parma ham. Prosciutto di Parma (Parma Ham) has the reputation of being an absolutely natural product that manages to be delicious, easily digestible, and nutritional. The 2,000-year-old tradition of breeding and slaughtering the pigs, and curing, slicing, and packaging the meat, makes it a gourmet meat product. Italian law protects the authenticity of the tradition by allowing only pigs with a certain ‘pedigree’ to be called Parma hams. They have to be born within the approved areas and selected farms, and they should spend at least four months in north central Italy. Their diet must consist of maize, barley, cereals, and, most importantly, whey from Parmigiano Reggiano cheese production that makes the pigs fatter and tastier than in other regions. Parma ham is made from the rear haunches of animals weighing at least 160 kg, which are aged at least nine months. The ratio between lean meat and fat is optimal. The Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma, Parma Ham Consortium of farmers and producers protects and assures the quality and authenticity of the product and enforces full respect for tradition.

Geographical indications are valuable to producers for the same reason that trademarks are valuable. Geographical indications serve the same functions as trademarks, because like trademarks they are:

1. source-identifiers,
2. guarantees of quality, and
3. valuable business interests.

To that end, intellectual property owners must be armed with information about domestic and foreign systems of GI protection in order to fully leverage the value added by GIs to their goods and services both at home and abroad.

Thailand has started a significant international collaboration in the field of Intellectual Property Rights. After implementing a national Regulation to protect and valorise the national GIs (Act on Protection of Geographical Indication B.E. 2546 (2003) Thailand is now committed through the DIP (Department of Intellectual Property) to extend GIs protection and give them an additional value by registering Thai GIs in EU according to EC Reg. 510/2006.

The main constraints that Thailand is facing in the field of GIs, are connected to the know-how and experience on “practical” issues and “on field” activities required to register and protect local GIs according to EC standards. Basically, expertise on

internal control procedure, control plan, inspection, and certification are required. In particular Thai GI lodgers and the DIP, among the other, are asking for tangible results for Thai GIs, that means first of all more protection, value and new market possibilities.

The project that will be carried out by the Thai-Italian Chamber of Commerce and Bioagricoop, a non profit organization for international co-operation in bio-organic agriculture and sustainable development is looking to give tangible solutions to their most urgent needs by transferring EU competencies and know-how not yet available in Thailand.

The project creates important synergies with the ongoing and future initiatives.

Considering that the WTO TRIPS Agreement is currently the primary mean for protecting GIs at an international level and that, however, it does not guarantee high level of protection and allows the misuse of geographical indications especially for products other than wines and spirits, for example “*Roquefort-type cheese made in Australia*” or “*American Basmati rice*”, EU and Thailand start to strongly encourage and support registration and therefore full protection of EU and Thai GIs respectively on Thai and EU market.

We will target Thai GI lodgers and give assistance and follow up to those selected as a pilot group. We believe that the circulation of the experiences learned by Thai operators in the process to get EU protection and best practices presentation will increase the potential for new GIs registration according to EC standards and therefore improved protection, visibility and value for Thai GIs through the use of EC logos.

All Thai GI lodgers already registered in Thailand, currently 18 organizations, will be invited to take part to the project's main event and learn from the experiences and best practices to protect their GIs according to EC Reg. 510/2006.

Moreover, a pilot group of them, four organizations, will be selected and followed up during the preparation of internal control procedures manuals and control plans (certification body will therefore be able to inspect and certify according to requirements set by EC Reg.).

Finally one or two organizations, representing in total up to 500 farmers, will be led until GI products final registration and protection in EU.

The Thai GI lodgers to be targeted by the project are:

Mae Jeam Teen Jok Fabric; Doi Chaang Coffee, the single-estate coffee produced by a northern Thailand hill tribe in the Golden Triangle mountains; **Chaiya Salted Eggs**, of particularly good quality and special characteristics such as yolks that are particularly red and large; **Lamphun Brocade Thai Silk; Praewa Kalasin Thai Silk; Thung Kula Rong-Hai Thai Hom Mali Rice**, this rice is grown mainly in 19 northeastern provinces, particularly in the Thung Kula Ronghai area, or the Weeping Prairie. Amnat Charoen Province is one of the major areas in the Northeast, where Hom Mali rice is in great demand in both local and overseas markets. **Nanglae Pineapple, Changrai Phulae Pineapple, Sakon Dhavapi Haang Golden Aromatic Rice, Chainat Khaotangkwa Pomelo, Sriracha Pineapple, Surat Thani Oyster, Sangyod Muang Phattalung Rice, Trang Rost Pork, Doi Tung Coffee, Phrua Plateau Wine, Nakornchaisri Pomelo, Petchabun Sweet Tamarind.**

Due to the great variety of Thai food, culture and landscape, a certain number of new organizations and farmers are expected to ask for registration according to Thai

regulation, and later, they may ask to be recognised by EC regulation and we hope they benefit from the project activities.