

## **Building a Quality Label<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Summary**

*As part of the measures taken to support diversification in disadvantaged regions (Integrated Development Project (IDP: 1985-1990), which then became Objective 5B zones (Rural Zones Development Project (RZDP 1992-1999)), one project successfully introduced a beef production and marketing chain, carrying the Ardenne Label. This experiment later provided inspiration for the introduction of an approved label system throughout the Walloon Region (Belgium). An analysis of the development of the Label Ardenne project, how it took concrete shape and its subsequent extension in the Walloon Quality Label, read in terms of socio-technical networks, demonstrates the limits of a quality chain project built on supply, and its difficulties in responding to demand and in managing the mass arrival of consumers into the picture with the generic quality crisis in the beef sector.*

### **Introduction**

The building of Europe has, since the beginning, been based on a double economic and political objective: the constitution of a single trading area which is competitive at the world level, and achieving internal cohesion by reducing regional disparities. Through the CAP the economic logic has been expressed in the growing specialization and intensification of farm holdings and by the restructuring of the sector, including a moving away from less profitable holdings. This double movement of specialization and restructuring has not, however, led to the disappearance of regional imbalances which are essentially intra-national in nature. This led the Union to introduce in 1975 a more targeted regional policy, with the Union designating “disadvantaged” regions characterized by “retarded development”. In addition to the general agricultural support measures, these regions were to benefit from a specific development programme<sup>3</sup>.

In this way, for the first time at the European level, the region of south-east Belgium was recognized as a disadvantaged region. In the second phase (1985-1989) of the development policies, the south-east, like Lozère (France) was to benefit from the support of an experimental programme: the Integrated Development Programme (IDP). In addition to the criteria of disadvantaged zones, the exploratory studies begin for the first time to include certain new aspects: the region possesses certain advantages, among them its nature, its scenic

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<sup>3</sup>The criteria used in applying the directive on mountain agriculture and in certain disadvantaged zones are those of national average (income, return, population density), compensatory indemnity measures and investment aid.

landscapes, .... the task being to build new production chains on a more endogenous basis. The third phase of the development policies came with the reform of the EEC Structural Funds, which were to extend the work begun by the IDP in the south-east via the Rural Zone Development Plans (RZDP). Through these three programmes agricultural policy in the rural development area seemed to be looking to achieve a triple shift: from agriculture to a search for convergence between the agricultural and non-agricultural areas, from a policy of compensating handicaps to a policy of making maximum use of resources, and from administrative and sector-based regulation towards the idea of projects brought together at the local level<sup>4</sup>. What practical form has this shift in development policies taken in the introduction of new production chains in south-east Belgium and in particular in the emergence of the first quality chains? Do we indeed see new inter-relationships between the farming profession and other players, the maximum exploitation of existing advantages and the substitution of a regulatory approach by the state by a more pro-active approach? These are the questions we attempt to approach via an analysis of the introduction of the first beef labelling chain.

## **2. Label Ardenne: a project born of the profession**

### **2.1 The initial project: professionalization and relocation of fattening**

In the early 1980s, the powers that be responsible for farming in south-east Belgium decided to promote cattle fattening. They were convinced that the development of farm holdings in the south-east involved the relocation and professionalization of fattening. Beef fattening had traditionally been “exported” to specialist units in other regions, with the south-east providing initial breeding and raising. The introduction of milk quotas in 1984 was to precipitate this choice: many cattle breeders whom the introduction of quotas prevented from further developing their mixed farms decided to specialize in meat and to attempt to make the move to fattening. This took the form at the regional level of a specialization in fattening, with the idea of bringing back home the substantial added value achieved with beef fattening.

South-east Belgium has a specific farming supervisory system centred on the beef economy which represents  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the income of the zone. This is organized within the Information and Promotion Division (DIP) of the Rural Economy Centre (CER). Initially the DIP succeeded, via the CER network, in persuading those in charge of the EEC's Integrated Development Programme to appoint it as the operator of the agricultural strand<sup>5</sup>.

With the support of the CER and IDP secured, the DIP was faced with a double question: first of all, was the Blanc Bleu Belge race of beef cattle suitable for fattening in south-east Belgium, and secondly: would cattle farmers accept their new identity as stock breeders/fatteners? To answer this question, it set up a beef fattening observation and experimentation network known as the Fattening References Centre (Centre de Références d'Engrissement - CRE).

### **2.2 Opening a negotiating arena: the certification principle**

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<sup>4</sup> **Mormont, M. (1992)** Politiques européennes et développement régional : le cas du Sud Est belge, Revue de géographie alpine 1992, N°4

<sup>5</sup> In Belgium, as a result of the regionalization process, the farming strand and the non-farming strand are managed by different institutions.

Interest in the fattening practises which the IDP was promoting ran up, however, against the less avowable but widespread practice in the sector of “injecting the animals”, that is fattening with the help of hormones. This treatment procured such a financial and commercial advantage that those who refused to go along had difficulty in finding buyers. Nonetheless, one of them, “*wanting to sleep soundly at night in his own bed*”<sup>6</sup> sought in 1985 the help of PROMAG, a not-for-profit organization “*being traumatized by the difficulty of selling uninjected animals*”<sup>7</sup>.

PROMAG was then known as a certification body. PROMAG offered its skills, that is its knowledge of certification following its work in certifying the “Jambon d’Ardenne” registered designation of origin as well as its theoretical knowledge of a beef label, the Label Rouge Charolais du Centre (“Red Label”). PROMAG responded to the fatteners’ demand and proposed organizing the exclusion of hormones by introducing specifications specific to the Blanc Bleu Belge du Sud Est (BBSE) breed, inspired by the French example. This was discussed during a meeting of fatteners at the IDP’s premises at the CER. The alliance between the IDP and PROMAG was sealed based on the specifications which transformed BBSE fatteners into certified BBSE fatteners (BBSEC), whilst PROMAG also obtained, via the DIP, IDP funding for its certification activities…

PROMAG’s involvement marked a turning point in the Label Ardenne project, that is, the DIP’s professional project to use an initial system - the Reference Centres - to interest stock breeders in moving to fattening. The support from PROMAG extended the arena for possible negotiations<sup>8</sup> and changes and the idea of private certification of beef fattening began to take root. PROMAG was changing the identity of the DIP’s professional fatteners into certified hormone-free fatteners, and the identity of the Blanc Bleu Belge from the south-east into Blanc Bleu Belge Label Ardenne, which was later rechristened, to mark the move, Blanc Bleu d’Ardenne.

The principle of Label Ardenne certification was based on the commitment by producers to respect a certain number of specific standards, negotiated with PROMAG and contained in written specifications, with the respecting of its standards being guaranteed to consumers by the accreditation of the fatteners and the control of their practices at every level of the chain by the certification body.

An analysis of the changes between the French Label Rouge specifications, which provided the source of inspiration, and the Label Ardenne specifications highlights the items specific to PROMAG certification. These are important items<sup>9</sup>, and were reached by consensus and then established in the written specifications.

### **2.3 The Label Ardenne specifications: stabilisation of the agreement and alliances**

A comparison of the two sets of specifications surprises the reader by its similarities: the breakdown and structure of the first document is reflected in the second, with the titles taken over verbatim. But a comparison

<sup>6</sup> The expression “sleeping soundly at night in one’s own bed” was particularly appropriate given that certain fatteners, out of fear of seeing their animals collapse in their stalls as a result of the hormone treatments, used to spend the night on a camp bed in order to be able to bleed the victim immediately.

<sup>7</sup> The term “injected” refers to all illicit forms of hormone treatment: injections, food additives, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Callon, M. (1989a). La protohistoire d’un laboratoire. La Science et ses réseaux. Paris, La découverte, 66-115.

<sup>9</sup> Latour, B. (1989) La Science en Action, Paris, La Découverte

also reveals three major scars which are all changes which differentiated the Blanc Bleu d'Ardenne from the Charolais du Centre: the guaranteeing hormone-free beef via a ban, a project to create a link with the local territory, and an attempt to define the quality of the meat.

### **The no-hormone guarantee: the heart of the certification**

The central change brought about by the Label Ardenne project was to enhance the market value of natural, hormone-free fattening. In order to achieve this, the specifications severed in various ways any possible links (real or imaginary) between the animals and the hormones.

Hormones were, of course, banned, even for therapeutic purposes, which was something new compared with the Charolais du Centre. The control of this ban was organized systematically at every level of the chain by an independent certification body (PROMAG), which approved and regulated fatteners, slaughterhouses and butchers in this respect. The application of the PROMAG system (organization of meat traceability, identification sheets, stamps, control, analysis, sanctions, regulations, approvals) reinforced the no-hormone promise. This system, linked to the application and the control of the standard as well as the standardization of the laboratory controls was backed up by a preventive system: approved stock breeders were filtered based on their reputation with the DIP. The constraint was clear: the fatteners as well as every player along the label Ardenne chain accepted a total ban on hormones and targeted control by an independent body, PROMAG, with the discovery of traces of these substances being enough to exclude the animal's owner<sup>10</sup>.

### **Number of animals per hectare, local foodstuffs: the project for a link with the local territory**

The second change concerned the link to the local territory, a concept that both the DIP and PROMAG dreamed about. The project was already present on the future logo of the Ardenne label: a countryside of hills traversed by meadows and planted with pine trees. The south-east is the country of fattening, linked to a particular area, and to the soil.

By imposing as an initial measure the standard of three large head of cattle per hectare as a new constraint compared with the reference used for the Charolais du Centre, Label Ardenne established a measurable equivalence between the fatteners and 3 animals per hectare<sup>11</sup>. This removed the project from the covetousness of out-of-field fattening units in the north of the country and the threat of competition. The second measure suggested (“...and one should use only...”) using fodder and foodstuffs traditional to the region, in the hope that the DIP’s Reference Centres would be able to come up with (“should make it possible to provide...”) (economically) more interesting formulae “... giving a better-tasting meat....”. This measure was not binding and was based entirely on the hypothetical capacity of the Fattening Reference Centres to develop formulae which would link local foodstuffs to meat quality.

### **The quality of fattened BBAs**

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<sup>10</sup> In addition a written agreement between Label Ardenne - and the stock breeder states that if the latter controls positively, on either a label or non-label animal, he owes a fine of BEF 500,000.

<sup>11</sup> This provision is not unambiguous: the standard provides more a production right than an extensification standard linked to the number of forage hectares.

The third change related to the expected fattening quality of the animals. Unlike the Charolais du Centre reference document, the BBA specification left open the question of declassifying animals as sub-standard, explaining in vague and uncertain language the reasons for which an animal could be declassified. These explanations were loaded with ifs and buts which considerably emasculated the provision<sup>12</sup>. Two passages illustrate this statement: the definition of the race concerned and the reasons for classification and declassification:

**Charolais du Centre :**

« Breed criteria: only animals from the Charolais breed are admitted... Conformation : only carcasses classified as E.U.R in the EUROPA catalogue may be labelled ... State of fattening: carcasses must not be too fat or not fat enough. Only categories 2 and 3 from the EUROPA catalogue will be accepted

The identification of the Charolais breed is a fact. Its history, going back to the 19th century, has evinced any doubt, the Charolais is clearly and evidently a specific breed. Classification was based on the carcass, with equivalence established using a scale of recognized and known references (the EUROPA catalogue), and applying this both to the state of the carcass and conformance.

**Blanc Bleu d'Ardenne :**

« BBB breed: characteristic features: white skin with “blue magpie” or “black magpie” colouring. Conformation, see Annex 1. The conformation should respond as far as possible to the needs of the retail and wholesale butchers who distribute the labelled meat..... Declassification: declassification will be applied when an animal does not progress in the same way as the rest of the batch and its morphology departs from the standard morphology of the Blanc Bleu Belge for animals of the same age.”

This opened up the “Pandora’s box” of the Blanc Bleu Belge: the colours vary, the shape had to meet the needs of wholesale and retail butchers, about which nothing was said .... The statement was loaded with clauses (colour, shape, ....) which rendered the classification/declassification of the BBA dependent on the needs of wholesale and retail butchers, the progress of the whole batch, and the standard morphology of animals of the same age, which can conceal at times very different carcasses. The criteria of declassification, that is the equivalence established with the batch as a whole and the standard morphology, was unclear, making judgement uncertain. The lack of precision expressed the enormous problem facing the marketing of the BBA (which is, genetically speaking, BBB): genetic diversity of the young BBB breed, the difficulty of estimating on the live animal the portion of meat meeting the standard, and the demands of wholesale and retail butchers with respect to the carcass, shape and state of fattening.

## 2.4 Interim conclusion

The Label Ardenne specifications mirrored the cooperation mechanisms organized by the Label Ardenne chain. These were:

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<sup>12</sup> Latour, B. (1989) La Science en Action, Paris, La Découverte

- a solid system for guaranteeing hormone-free meat based on certification and the principle of exclusion from the chain, with the central player being the certification body PROMAG;
- the project of providing a territorial link based on the future results of research carried out at the “fattening” Reference Centres, based on matching an animal (beef cattle) with a territorial unit defined by the IDP (south-east Belgium);
- an animal representing the *nec plus ultra* of Belgian stock breeding, the Blanc Bleu Belge which was expected to change into Blanc Bleu d’Ardenne.

The couplet of agricultural supervisory authority (CER) and the development programme (IDP) brought together and financed both PROMAG and the Fattening Reference Centre under the “better utilization of regional potential” heading of the Integrated Development Programme (1986-1992). The mobilization work undertaken by the agricultural technicians with fatteners and beef cattle (1986-1988) was to confirm the way the DIP and the IDP perceived the labelling chain project: the groups of fatteners and the leader of the new chain were the products of the consultation structures imposed by the IDP, that is the grassroots committees made of representatives of the profession. Finally the breed being fattened was the Blanc Bleu Belge, the breed which was already mobilizing most of the CER’s resources.

Curiously, the downstream links which play an essential role in the traditional beef and veal slaughtering and marketing chain (wholesalers and wholesale butchers, slaughterhouses and butchers) were practically silent: just five words in the specifications are spared for wholesale butchers (“needs of the wholesale butchers”) with butchers’ shops defined in terms of label exclusivity and control of certification, all mechanisms aimed uniquely at combating the use of hormones. As for consumers, without waiting for any invitation from the IDP, they went for the label *en masse*, and ended up changing the criteria used to qualify the Blanc Bleu d’Ardenne label.

### **3. *En masse* arrival of consumers**

Alongside the Label Ardenne chain which had become the profession’s answer and which the Information and Promotion Division had set up when confronted with the question of hormones, one witnessed, from the early 1980s onwards, the development of a broader forum on the question of hormones. Are hormones used to fatten beef cattle? Do they remain in the meat? Do they represent a hazard to consumer health? The fact is that hormones were circulating, with clandestine laboratories producing syringes and related material, secretly swelling the animal’s muscles and the meat on the butcher’s counter without being immediately visible, multiplying in number and diversifying in order to get round the laboratories which were tracking them, and proving their effectiveness by remaining impossible to pin down for consumers who increasingly sought to measure their strength and danger.

#### **3.1 Hormones: a socially constructed risk**

In this way the concept of nutritional danger linked to the use of hormones as a fattening additive was built up during the 1980s. The first research results proving the toxicity of the hormones were published at the start of

the 1980s, with the Belgian press widely echoing the first scandals on the illicit use of hormones in meat fattening. The question forced a series of players to define their positions: certain scientists who had dreamed up hormone fattening stopped their work<sup>13</sup>, others got busy devising ways of trapping illicit practices in their test-tubes and published alarming opinions, whilst in 1988 European legislation finally banned all preventive use of hormones. The water which the hormones fix was sweating out of the carcasses ... the piece of meat floating in the pan<sup>14</sup> was insinuating doubts into the housewife's mind .. and the widely-heard Belgian consumer association "Test Achat" suspected every year more and more fraudulent practices which it tried, unsuccessfully, to uncover...

Finally, it was the publication of its first positive results in 1989 which provoked a generalized denunciation<sup>15</sup>: not only are hormones used for fattening but they are invading butchers' shops and end up in our plates: 25% of samples are positive, and one butchers' shop in four sells meat illegally treated with hormones, presenting a serious risk for consumer health. Hormones now had a face to them, eliciting an angry response from the sector, media support, readers' letters, etc. The battle of the hormones had begun.

The response of the consumers' representative organization was to call for state intervention: "*only fear of the policeman can influence the situation. Who is the policeman?*". For this fear of the policeman Label Ardenne was able skilfully to substitute "*men who commit to guarantee you 100% natural meat*" and to bring new consumers and butchers into the Label Ardenne fold<sup>16</sup>.

If the survey results highlighted the risks to consumer health of the eating of beef, they also consecrated the entry *en masse* of consumers as active players in beef chains by making the hormone-free guarantee the obligatory point of passage.

Initially, Label Ardenne's sales volume grew in pace with the publication of positive analyses. After all, it was supported by an extremely resistant system guaranteed both by its private certification system, preventive filtering specific to the DIP network within the profession, and a substantial financial incentive which was deemed to compensate fatteners committing to produce naturally.

However, this growth generated by consumer fears of the food risk linked to hormones was to have a double negative side-effect:

- in the short term, the revelation of the large-scale use of hormones, the doubt insinuating into the beef market, and expanding demand for the Label Ardenne product attracted new players: players from the

<sup>13</sup> See in particular the end-of-study theses by L Ruelle (1985) *Effet de la GH Bovine Exogène*, FSA Gembloux, 108 p. V Caes (1985) *Effets de l'hormone de croissance sur les génisses de race BBB-M en croissance engrassement : aspects zootechniques et physiologiques*, FSA Gembloux 96p.

<sup>14</sup> Vandemeulenbroucke, J. (1993) *De Hormonenmafia*, Hadewijch Antwerpen, 173 p.

<sup>15</sup> Belgium's Test Achat magazine ran the headline "*False beef, true hormones*" (Test Achat Magazine, January 1989, no 307, Brussels) with a cover photo of a butcher "at work". A year later a second survey by the powerful consumer organization confirmed "*One steak in five with hormones*" (Test Achat Magazine, January 1990, no 318).

<sup>16</sup> Between 1989 and 1991, Label Ardenne sales rose by 50% a year and the number of butchers' shops increased by a factor of four.

- downstream links in the beef chain were to enter into the Label Ardenne chain out of commercial opportunism, seeking to turn to their advantage the crisis surrounding the generic quality of the meat.
- in the longer term, it was the quality specification itself which was at stake: hormones, by giving Label Ardenne a “guaranteed no hormones” profile, had the effect of diluting the other aspects of the quality specification ... thereby weakening the plan of the profession and of the certification body who wanted more and more to offer a precise quality: that provided by Blanc Bleu d’Ardenne (and not Blanc Bleu Belge) fatteners *“that undertake to produce and guarantee a meat .... which is the fruit of healthy feeding based on regional products”*<sup>17</sup>

### 3.2 Defection of the Fattening Reference Centres

The plan to define Label Ardenne meat based on a specific feeding regime was an integral part of the specifications. The scheme’s promoters looked to the research being carried out by the Fattening Reference Centres (CREs), supported by the IDP, to define the rations which would deliver the taste quality of the meat by establishing a clear connection to a production system linked to the local territory (meadow grazing). The Reference Centres in fact never delivered. What blocked them was the complexity of the interactions between the food - as transformed in the ruminants’ stomachs - and the genetic variability of the young Blanc Bleu Belge breed (conformation, meat quality). The project of matching a section of the consumer market whose choices are dictated by colour, smell, taste, juiciness, tenderness and overall appreciation on the one hand with production systems spread over a territory consisting of several regions, on the other, was ambitious. However, the CRE’s research was to be limited to production systems without affecting the downstream links in the chain.

The results obtained from 1993 onwards were disappointing<sup>18</sup>, confirming other research carried out abroad<sup>19</sup>. These showed that the quality (and differentiation) of beef depends in the first instance on the slaughtering conditions and the maturation of the carcasses. Breed and age at slaughtering can also be differentiation factors. This meant that it was practically impossible to typify the meat from bulls from the Label Ardenne chain and to differentiate it from meat from Blanc Bleu Belge bulls on the basis of specific feeding.

This defection by the Fattening Reference Centres concealed a second defection: that of the test consumers who refused to validate this meat label which was being offered to them. Indeed, after training 15 weeks in the use of descriptors (colour, smell, savour, juiciness, tenderness), the testers actually exhibited a preference for meat from

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<sup>17</sup> It is in the light of this over-definition which consumers imposed on the Label Ardenne chain that one can understand the very diverging comments from players in the chain. One the one hand a wholesale butcher was heard to exclaim enthusiastically: *“the more hormones there are, the better it is (for our guaranteed no-hormones chain)”* whilst the certification body conceded with regret that *“the hormones have always been a considerable embarrassment to us.”*

<sup>18</sup> M Sindic, A Bastiaens et C Deroanne (1993) “Beef quality: influence of breed, conformation and feeding regime in beef quality: reality or myth”. BAMST asbl study day 20/10/93, P9

<sup>19</sup> Sylvander, B. (1994) La qualité du consommateur final au producteur, Research study, Systèmes Agraires Dev, 1994, 28: 27-49

batches of animals fed on concentrates, and ranked last those animals that had been put out to graze<sup>20</sup>. This final failure of test consumers to deliver and the resistance of the Blanc Bleu Belge bulls aborted the quality-feeding connection that the CRE's had been trying to produce. To bulls from the dream landscape of the Label Ardenne the jury preferred the feeding trough and concentrates.... Disappointment of the profession, silence from wholesale butchers attracted originally by the “hormone-free” guarantee. However, at the same time as this failure, the private certification system was to obtain a decisive institutional extension.

#### **4 From local project to public system: the Blanc Bleu Fermier Walloon quality label**

In fact the setting up of the Label Ardenne network coincided with the second phase of the reform of the Belgian institutions in August 1988. Among these reforms the central government transferred major agricultural competencies to the regions, including labelling. This regionalization marked an important step for local initiatives attempting to introduce new quality systems, creating as it did a new arena for local arrangements which the central state, dominated by the productivist model, had not permitted.

The Label Ardenne certification body rushed into this new institutional arena, mobilizing all its resources to obtain rapidly a label recognition from the Walloon Region. In 1988-89 PROMAG drew up a technical memorandum which provided the inspiration for the main lines of the Walloon Decree of 7/09/89 defining the Walloon Quality Label (Label de Qualité Wallon - LQW). The general organization obviously reflected that of the French Red Label, stating that the label is a collective trademark, owned by the Executive of the Walloon Region, and setting up a labels and registered designation of origin committee, made up of representatives of the professional organizations, the scientific world and certification bodies, as well as the Regional Office for the Promotion of Agricultural and Horticultural Products (Office Régionale de Promotion des Produuits Agricoles et Horticoles).

The first quality label (for beef) saw the light of day on 23/12/92 in the wake of the decree. This was the “Blanc Bleu Fermier” Walloon quality label. The decree established the specifications as well as the minimum control plan which certification bodies had to submit to. In the meantime Promag had been joined by a second certification body, Procerviq. Outside control bodies tasked with carrying out laboratory analyses for the certification bodies were approved. With the official recognition of the Blanc Bleu Fermier, the labelling system became more complex. However, in its basic operating principles it is essentially equivalent to the private certification system introduced by the Label Ardenne cooperative. A local initiative centred on the IDP zone of south-east Belgium had finally led to the setting up of a public system codifying entry conditions, sanctions and practices and defining a possible specification for beef by obtaining a quality label recognized by the public authorities. In this process of institutionalisation, the specifications, already excessively determined by hormones, lost even more of their specificity, with the amount of land per animal (3 large animal units per

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<sup>20</sup> Willem G., Nicolay L., Syndic M., Delvaux, A. Kraft, A. Deroanne, C. (1996) “Comparison of the organoleptic quality of Blanc Bleu Belge meat produced from 3 feeding systems” in: Industrial Production and Sensorial Quality: 8th Scientific and Technological Meetings of Food Industries, Dijon 339 – 344.

hectare) being replaced by a ceiling on production rights of 200 animals, at the request of the second certifying body (Procerviq).

The Bleu Blanc Fermier Walloon quality label immediately enrolled the Label Ardenne and two other private certification chains, thereby providing them with recognition and better legal protection. Starting in 1993, in a general context of a growing crisis of consumer confidence and of prices more favourable to fattening<sup>21</sup>, a dozen new label chains were to be initiated based on this new collective resource introduced by the Walloon Region. These new label chains were set up primarily by wholesale butchers, with three of them falling under the “enhancement of animal value” heading of the Rural Zones Development Programme of Objective 5B. On average the Blanc Bleu Fermier Walloon quality label represents 1.5% of beef cattle slaughtered in Wallonia.

Following this, public policy in combating the use of additives (hormones and antibiotics) in beef production was not to play in favour of the public label, thereby creating confusion among consumers between a European policy of cleaning up the sector and label production. The latter, unable to define itself more specifically than the question of hormones, began to decline starting in 1997. Label Ardenne in particular, the chain which had formed the basis of the Walloon label, gradually lost its butcher customers, who were picked up by other smarter label chains: the wholesale butchers who had entered the label following the hormone crisis went their own way and set up their own chain, emptying Label Ardenne of its fatteners and butchers. Label Ardenne decided to cease its activities in April 1997.

## 5. Some final reflections

How is this triple shift which we mentioned in our introduction coming about, via the Label Ardenne and the Walloon quality label, the producer-marketing chains of which have been supported in turn by the Integrated Development Plan, then by the Rural Zones Development Plan (Objective 5B)?

### A professional project

On the question of the search for convergence between the agricultural and non-agricultural areas we have emphasized several times that the Label Ardenne project was a professional project, initiated by a farming supervisory service, that is, the Information and Promotion Division of the Rural Economy Centre and by well-to-do farmers representing the profession, that is, the members of the grassroots committee. This is a project which was defined by supply and by the resources which it was able to muster: a breed which had structured the whole of the beef fattening support system and which was well adapted to respond to the hormone scare; the networks of cattle breeders who were more accustomed to representing the profession which set up a project; and research centres which focused more on production (the reference centres’ farm holdings) than on the whole range of players who could have contributed to the chain. For example, retail and wholesale butchers, the downstream links in the chain, were not actively involved in the construction of the project. On the other hand the cooperation of a certification body fundamentally changed the vision of the players by proposing that it

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<sup>21</sup> Fall in the differential between the price per kilo of lean and fattened meat (1992-1995)

organize, on a voluntary basis, a change in the prescriptive authority, with a private certification body taking over the traditional role of the state, negotiating new standards and organizing the monitoring of the same on a voluntary basis.

### **Blurring of the qualification criteria and mass arrival of consumers**

The labelling innovation, however, never achieved its goal. The attempt to benefit from resources specific to the south-east by specifying criteria for labelled meat was to fail for two reasons: the over-determinant role of hormones and the defection of the Fattening Reference Centres. The crisis of the generic quality (standard) of beef blurred the specification projects by overemphasising the general problem of hormones within the label chain and by mobilizing almost all its forces. In this way the label fell into its own trap by attracting into its network players (wholesale butchers) whose sole concern was to find an answer to the threat posed by hormones. The inability of the Reference Centres to link the taste quality of the meat to a particular feeding regime, and to a particular territory, further weakened the specificity of the label.

Without underestimating the difficulties specific to cattle in general and to the Blanc Bleu Belge breed in particular and to the rendering of carcasses into individual meat portions, other case studies which are under way in the cattle sector appear to indicate that, on the contrary, a construction which is genuinely coordinated between all the links in the chain is able, albeit on a smaller scale, to produce a real quality specification using items such as territory, breed, age, etc. This leads us to stress what seems to us to be a vital precondition for building a quality chain: consumer involvement. The Label case study highlights two aspects: the fact that what is perceived as a food hazard for human health is a social construct, a process in time which, from alliance to transformation, solidifies to constitute finally an obligatory point of passage, but also the inevitable massed entry, from the consumer area, of those who set themselves up as spokespersons, organizing their own forum and inviting themselves ultimately to the table of the chain.... The consumer question shows how a larger crisis, that of hormones at the national and European level, interfered in a project which was, in principle, limited to the south-east.

### **Endogenous or exogenous development?**

With respect to the Label Ardenne chain and the genesis of the Bleu Blanc Fermier Walloon quality label, the analysis tool (socio-technical networks) which we have not developed in this text, enables us to open up the arena of the Label Ardenne initiative and to move beyond the physical limits of the chain (legal structure) to draw the following lessons from it:

The starting point, the idea of the label chain, is clearly endogenous, coming from breeders whose ethical concerns - “the desire to sleep well in their own beds” - motivated the first steps. Via the IDP and the grass roots committees representing the farming profession it was rapidly hooked up to the professional supervisory structure of the region, which became the promoter of the Label Ardenne by integrating the breeders’ concerns into a wider project for developing the south-east which the IDP had defined. The CER’s Information and Promotion Division then established the connections between the Rural Economy Centre’s network, that of the

Integrated European Development programme and the PROMAG network. As B. Pecqueur proposes<sup>22</sup>, these networks constructed a specific shared asset, a developing idea of territoriality symbolized by the Bleu Blanc d'Ardenne designation of origin, and which was emphasized in the various references to the Ardennes territory contained in the logos. Then, on the one hand, the excess determining power of hormones was to gradually dissolve this specific asset, attempts to draw up specifications failed, the Blanc Bleu d'Ardenne designation was abandoned, and butchers and fatteners quit the chain together with their wholesale butchers to set up other chains. On the other hand the network went on, via the Belgian institutional reforms, to create a new collective asset, the Bleu Blanc Fermier Walloon quality label. The dynamism of the Label Ardenne player-network emphasises the importance of the external systems to the chain itself: the French Red Label, Fattening Reference Centres, grassroots committee, consumer organization, etc., but also, more locally, butchers, slaughterhouses and wholesale butchers.... This dynamism in turn forms part of a wider movement of local networks, some of which operate even at a European level. For example, the European milk quota policy and the IDP and RZPD are found in the consumer's plate in the company of the meadows of the region of Bastogne and the Blanc Bleu d'Ardenne.

Beyond the approach in terms of European (Leader) programme and the multiple initiatives to support local development, an approach in terms of network rather than endogenous or exogenous development enables us to identify the different components of an initiative and to analyse the degree to which these networks can be potentially generalized and extended. Many similar local networks are based on forms of coordination which it is difficult to generalize because their coordination is linked to players (a breed, an animal, consumers) whose reproducibility is more limited than that of the technology (a label system), thereby limiting the reproducibility of the whole initiative. Finally the time factor, which we have suggested from time to time, cannot be left out of account. If the label has achieved such a high degree of institutionalisation, it is probably because of the continuity which the European Integrated Development programme and later the Rural Zone Development Programme offered to Label Ardenne, to PROMAG and to the agricultural supervisory authority between 1985 and 1994.

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<sup>22</sup> **Pecqueur, B. (1994).** La construction du territoire par les acteurs. Territoires ruraux et développement, quel rôle pour la recherche. CEMAGREF, 69-81p.