



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Globally Important
**AGRICULTURAL
HERITAGE**
Systems

An aerial photograph of a valley at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the landscape. The valley floor is filled with terraced fields, some of which are green and others are brown. There are several blue-roofed buildings in the foreground. The mountains in the background are silhouetted against the sky.

Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, Geographical Indications and Slow Food Presidia

Technical note

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Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
1. Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)	3
2. Geographical Indications (GI)	7
3. Slow Food Presidia	9
4. Comparison	10
5. Synergies	12
References	13

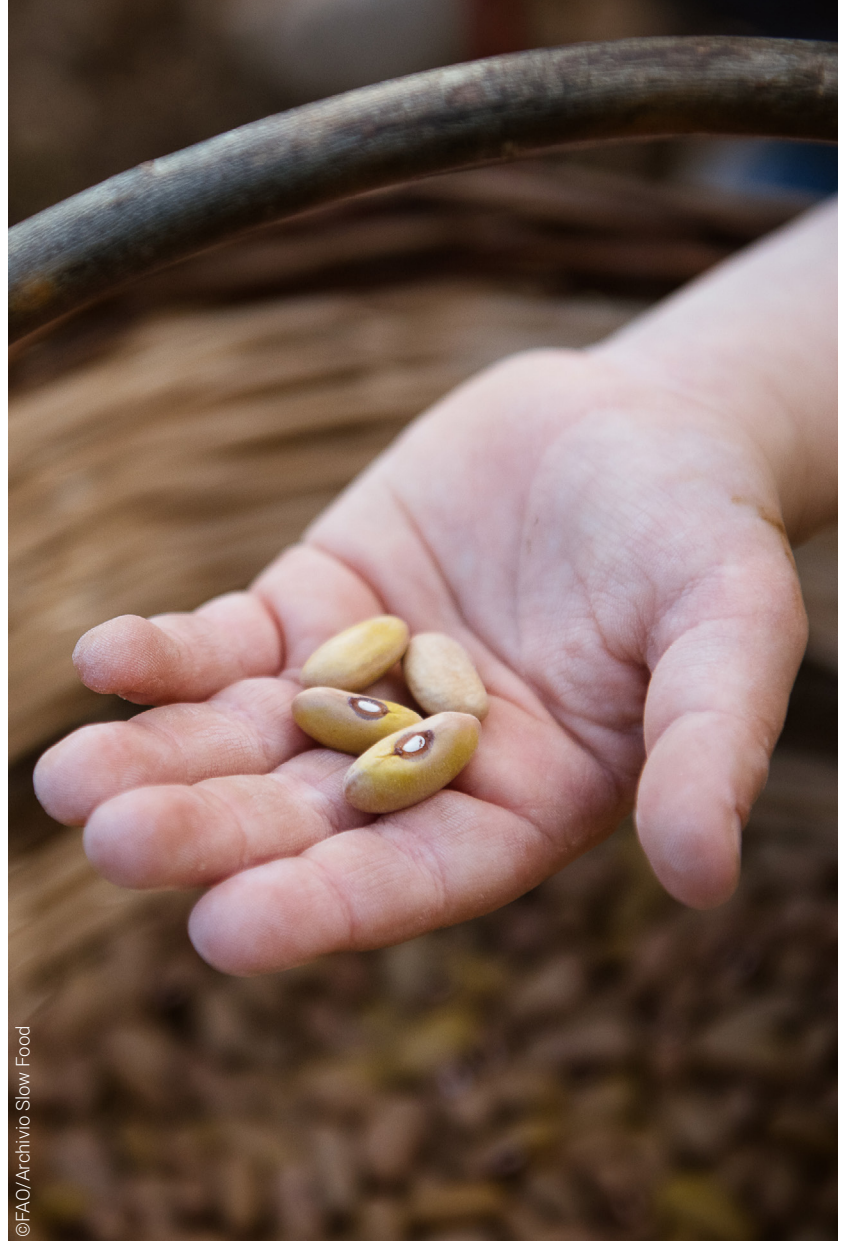


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iv|



©FAO/Archivio Slow Food

San Quirino is home of a local variety of bean cultivated in Northern Italy since the 1800s. Thanks to the Presidio designation, Slow food prevented the extinction of the San Quirino bean.

Introduction

Traditional food systems have been the focus of growing attention in recent decades. Developed over centuries and based on the interaction of humanity with nature, some of these systems are considered unique because of the strong links they sustain between and across local biodiversity, traditional food production and the culture of rural territories. The foods produced through these agricultural systems are the fruit of indigenous knowledge accumulated and passed down through generations of local people. In particular, with respect to the production of raw materials and food processing, this knowledge reflects the strenuous efforts of indigenous and local communities to respond to the challenges and needs of their natural environments and cultural contexts. Some of these foods are known not only for their quality but also for their relevance and connection to the identity of local people.

However, rapid changes in social, economic and environmental paradigms are contributing to the accelerated erosion of biodiversity and of traditional knowledge and agricultural practices around the world. In response, several international organizations have developed different approaches to recognize and preserve traditional and local food systems and support the small farmers who work within them, highlighting not only the importance of the systems themselves but the role and work of small farmers in providing precious economic and social services, and in maintaining these traditions and bicultural heritage for humanity as well as other benefits. By strengthening a sense of identity, ownership and pride among local populations, such approaches can play a significant role in supporting these food systems. They can also prove indispensable for preserving local biodiversity, maintaining traditional knowledge related to agriculture, and providing nutritious and high-quality products to local markets.

This technical note highlights the specificities of each approach, clarifies key differences between them and explores possible synergies. It also aims to encourage farmers and governments to contribute to and support the conservation of these fragile and remarkable local food systems, and as such, to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The note focuses on three approaches in particular: Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS), Geographical Indications (GI) and Slow Food Presidia.





21



©FAO/Consorzio Tutela Vini Soave e Recioto di Soave

Left photo: Soave Traditional Vineyards in Italy. Designated agricultural heritage by FAO in 2018. The hills and terraces of Soave represent one of the best-preserved agricultural systems of historical value in the Veneto region.

1. Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) promotes the valorization and visibility of farmers' wisdom and knowledge in developing sustainable and resilient food systems. In line with this principle, FAO developed the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) Programme. Launched as an initiative in 2002 and established as a corporate programme in 2015, the GIAHS approach has evolved to capitalize on specific aspects of traditional agriculture for its conservation and sustainable development. The Programme aims to highlight unique agricultural practices in communities that link food and livelihood security, agro biodiversity, culture and landscape in a systemic approach. As of June 2020, there were 61 designated GIAHS sites around the world.

These designations serve to increase awareness and visibility for the farmers who work in these traditional agricultural systems, and underscore the critical role they play in global issues. In addition, GIAHS also aims to promote sustainable and dynamic conservation of these systems, including through a range of development interventions related for example to value addition for GIAHS food products, technology transfer measures, agritourism activities, awareness-raising campaigns and supportive national policies.



Right photo: Takachihogo-Shiibayama Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry System in Japan. In this severe environment, the local population has established a distinctive and sustainable agriculture system.



4|



©FAO/Consorzio Tutela Vini Soave e Recioto di Soave

Left photo: Soave Traditional Vineyards in Italy. The Soave system still uses the traditional methods to grow the local grape variety known as Garganega.

The application process for GIAHS designation requires the appropriate government ministry to submit a proposal to FAO, and coordinate all actions for sustainable development or dynamic conservation of the given system(s). The Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) whose members are appointed by FAO, makes the final decision on designation after screening the proposal and relevant field surveys, based on five key selection criteria:

- i. food and livelihood security;
- ii. agro biodiversity;
- iii. traditional knowledge;
- iv. cultures and social values, and
- v. landscape features.

While some GIAHS sites have strong connections to specific products or types of product, it should be noted that a GIAHS designation does not apply to or focus on any single product, but rather on an agricultural system as a whole, with its associated agro biodiversity, traditional knowledge, cultures and landscapes. Indeed, the GIAHS application proposal does not need to mention requirements for products, evaluation processes or quality control mechanisms. It only aims to highlight the specific values and features of the agricultural system(s) that reflect its relevance as a site of global importance for agricultural heritage.

Moreover, it should be clarified that the joint FAO–GIAHS logo cannot be used as labelling for commercial purposes, due to its public nature. (Each GIAHS site can however create their own separate and specific labelling or logo for commercial purposes). For this reason it is interesting to review other tools, such as Geographical Indications (GI) and Slow Food Presidia, whose labels can be used for commercial purposes, including promoting sales and educating consumers on the differences in quality between labelled and non-labelled products.



Right photo: The Agricultural System of Valle Salado de Añana in Spain. Designated agricultural heritage by FAO in 2017. This productive system is a unique testimony to a traditional agricultural way of life.



6 |



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The Tushuri guda is a unique cheese from the Tusheti Mountains of Georgia. Wrapped in a sheepskin sack for its maturation, this millenary delicacy has obtained the GI to safeguard its natural and cultural heritage and prevent marketing abuses.

2. Geographical Indications (GI)

Geographical Indications (GI) have been in use since the beginning of the twentieth century, initially to protect wines from fraud and unfair competition. A GI is a sign which attests to the quality, specific characteristics or reputation of a product, as linked to its geographical origin. The differentiation of the product can be attributed to natural factors (such as soil, climate and water) or to human factors (such as local culture, expertise and tradition). These characteristics, along with production specifications (including control systems) are detailed in a code of practice, established by a collective organization in order to protect the given GI and obtain formal certification, depending on national legislation.

GI are thus used to increase both the credibility and visibility of a product, focusing on its quality as related to its geographical origin. Registered by national authorities, GI provide farmers and producers on the one hand with juridical protection from misuse in terms of name and fame, and consumers on the other hand with assurance on the quality and geographical origin of the product. GI are protected by intellectual property rights according to the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) and the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement. This means that GI are protected not only at national level but also at international level. According to the Organization for an International Geographical Indications Network (oriGIn), as of April 2020 there were 8228 registered GI products worldwide.

A GI registration often brings added value to the value chain; this can benefit and empower farmers and producers along the chain, for example through higher prices on the market or better sales.

GI may also contribute to the preservation of environment and biodiversity. Traditional methods of production usually have less impact on the environment than industrial methods, and the use of indigenous plant varieties and animal breeds (which may be endangered or facing extinction) can help to preserve biodiversity and heritage landscapes. The code of practice for the GI product may also include environmental criteria, in order to prevent local natural resources from being overexploited and to guarantee the sustainability of the system.

GI products usually have a long history of production in a specific environment. The production methods and output are therefore fine-tuned to a degree that ensures local resources are utilized sustainably and effectively. The GI process helps to preserve this production system, including the biodiversity and landscape that are indispensable for maintaining the desired quality of the product.





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In the mountains of northern Morocco, local communities have grown for centuries a native hardy variety of ancient wheat, the Rif einkorn. Through the Presidia programme, Slow Food has supported the maintenance of this unique cereal that does not require irrigation nor chemicals.

3. Slow Food Presidia

In 1999, the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity launched its designation programme, the Slow Food Presidia¹, to support traditional local products that are at risk of extinction, along with the unique agro biodiversity and farmer/producer knowledge that are associated with them. Presidia designation focuses strongly on social and environmental sustainability, as well as on the pride that farmers and producers have in their products, and the added value that consumers see in them. As of 2020, Slow Food now has 586 Presidia all over the world, ranging from the Red Maasai sheep in Kenya to the Heritage Sidomulyo banana varieties in Indonesia. Presidia include a variety of agricultural products such as fresh vegetables, honey and transformed products (e.g. aged meats).

Once a Slow Food Presidium is identified, it enables small-scale producers to come together and reflect on how they can improve their practices and promote their high-quality products, while making a positive impact on biodiversity conservation. A Presidium therefore forms a community that can unite local farmers and/or producers for a greater influence and voice in their respective territories. And as a more global network, these groups of small-scale producers also meet at local, regional and international events, to exchange knowledge and build on common experiences and issues.

Responding to requests from producers, Slow Food established the Slow Food Presidia label in 2008, to accompany, identify, protect and promote Slow Food Presidia products. “Slow Food Presidia” is now a registered brand, with a graphic logo and guidelines that producers must subscribe to. To date the Slow Food Presidia label has been applied to Presidia in Denmark, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and several other countries. It also includes two products from the Global South that are regularly processed in Italy: coffee and cacao. For these Presidia, production protocols and regulations were discussed not only with the producers (from the areas of origin) but also with Italian processors (including coffee roasters and chocolate producers).

Slow Food Presidia producers subscribe to a set of guidelines, committing themselves to respect and work in line with Slow Food philosophy and production protocols. Slow Food does not have an established quality guarantee system or a certification system, although the possibility of implementing participatory guarantee systems is being considered.



¹ Slow Food uses the plural “Presidia” to refer to the designation programme as a whole, and the singular “Presidium” to identify a given individual project within the programme.

4. Comparison

As summarized in Table 1, while GI aim to develop juridical protection of designations and geographical origin of products; Slow Food Presidia focuses more on the protection of biodiversity, small farmers and/or artisanal producers and associated agrifood practices; and a GIAHS designation covers a whole agricultural territory and agricultural system, including all social, economic and ecological dimensions of it. Thus, while biodiversity and landscape conservation and sustainability are fundamental for both GIAHS and Slow Food Presidia, GI systems do not oblige stakeholders to contribute to these aspects (although they are beginning to be considered increasingly in GI contexts as well).

Similar to Slow Food Presidia, GIAHS also focuses mainly on the agro-ecosystems that have a positive impact on biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation. However, Slow Food Presidia spotlights the actual products that result from these virtuous food production systems, as such becoming a tool that enables consumers and chefs to select food products that help maintain local and sustainable ecosystems and traditional know-how.

Both GI and Slow Food Presidia valorize products, but employ different approaches. Slow Food Presidia pays special attention to products at risk of extinction and to protecting small farmers from industrial appropriation and misuse of a terroir's fame or reputation. In the Presidia system every step of the entire value chain must take place in the territory, and the product is promoted through fairs and events, using a narrative label to educate consumers on the food system they are supporting. A focus on sustainability is generally not considered mandatory for GI at this time, but there has been a trend towards greater attention on this aspect in the production of GI foods.

All three approaches have experts' bodies that screen applications and decide on designations. In the case of GIAHS, it is mainly national governments that submit the application to FAO, with the SAG making decisions. For Slow Food Presidia and GI, the application is made by producers and their organizations to the Slow Food Foundation and to national governments respectively, each of which process their decisions according to their own rules and regulations. It is important to note however, that only GI offer producers official, public and juridical protection, implying a higher level of quality control for the products designated and certified through this process.



Table 1. A comparison of GIAHS, GI and Slow Food Presidia

Characteristics	GIAHS	GI	Slow Food Presidia
Object of designation	An agricultural system composed of traditional knowledge and practices, landscapes, culture and biodiversity	The name of a product, its characteristics, production methods and delimited geographical area of production	A product and its associated biodiversity and/or knowledge
Objective of designation	1. Highlighting unique knowledge, practices and landscapes 2. Dynamic conservation (as well as adaptation and development) of a site	Highlighting of the name, geographical origin and reputation of a product, and protection from misuse in markets	Highlighting products related with endangered biodiversity as well as social and cultural aspects, and integrating them into a strong network
Applying body	Ministry of agriculture or of environment, or national GIAHS committee	Farmers' and food processors' organizations (including all value chain stakeholders)	Farmers' and food processors' organizations (Slow Food members)
Criteria for designation/ decision/ selection	Selection criteria focus on: i) Food and livelihood security, ii) agro biodiversity, iii) traditional knowledge, iv) cultures and v) landscapes	Selection criteria relate to the quality, specific characteristics or reputation of a product as linked to its geographical origin	Selection criteria focus on products at risk of extinction, and relate to the local and traditional nature of a product, as well as associated agrobiodiversity, and farmers' and/or producers' knowledge
Governance body	GIAHS Programme (FAO) • FAO Committee on Agriculture • Decision on designation: Scientific Advisory GroupSAG • Management of designated GIAHS sites: site stakeholders (local and/or national government)	National government authorities • Decision on designation: experts' committee	Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity • Decision on designation: experts' committee
Endorsement from government	Not mandatory but considered as basic requirement	Mandatory	Not mandatory
Protocols/systems for quality management of agrifood products	Not required	Required and certified	Required in the new system but not certified
Biodiversity	Mandatory	Not mandatory but one of its characteristics	Mandatory
Promotion of sustainable methods	Mandatory (all GIAHS sites are designated based on their sustainability)	Not mandatory but sought after	Mandatory
Dynamic conservation approach (flexibility for changes in practice)	Yes	Yes, but only if revisions to the code of practice are approved	Yes
Focus on nutrition, healthy diet, food safety and quality	No	No explicit focus on nutrition, but food safety and quality are very important	In progress
Juridical protection	No	Yes (TRIPS Agreement and Geneva Act)	Yes (for products using the Slow Food logo as a trademark)



5. Synergies

All three designation systems share the common goal of promoting sustainable and unique farming and food production processes, to ensure their conservation along with associated biodiversity, knowledge and landscapes. Thus, although they perform different roles at different scales, there is great potential for synergies between them, particularly when they are used in appropriate combinations, such that one tool can address the gaps that another cannot fill.

For example, while GIAHS identifies an entire production system together with its landscape and biodiversity, its current framework lacks normative structures for quality management and product labelling. GI and/or Slow Food Presidia can be used to address this lack, and promote – where applicable and relevant – the agrifood products that are developed or produced by GIAHS sites.

Moreover, the promotion of GIAHS products could be reinforced through the guarantee of quality (that GIAHS cannot provide under the current system) by learning from experiences of GI and Slow Food Presidia. Adoption of GI could also protect farmers and producers in GIAHS sites from appropriation and misuse of names related to their products by producers in other places.

In terms of more substantial impacts, the use of a GI or Slow Food Presidium designation can have a positive impact on a GIAHS territory by adding value and promoting economic, social and environmental development. For example, both of these labels provide access to a range of farmer and producer organizations that can create and maintain jobs and economic growth for the territory.

In this context, it should be noted that the agricultural products of a GIAHS site for which GI or Slow Food designations can be applied must be clearly defined, as a GIAHS designation in itself does not specify products.

From a different angle, GIAHS designations can significantly enhance the attractiveness and reputation of GI or Slow Food Presidia products, as such products can then benefit from their relevance to the values that FAO ascribes to GIAHS sites, particularly in terms of the sustainability of local, adapted and traditional agricultural systems, as well as knowledge, cultures and landscapes. Furthermore, GIAHS sites, which are generally well conserved for centuries and sometimes even millennia, are usually scenic and aesthetically beautiful, and have become tourist attractions in themselves. The fact that a GI or Slow Food Presidium product is linked to such an area can further increase its value for the consumer.

One effect that can be expected to emerge as a result of combining these approaches for synergy would involve the enhancement of visibility for both the products and the territories in some kind of “labelled quality basket”. These different tools could also be used to raise awareness among different targeted audiences, as each of them has a different network. Valorization strategies and campaigns could be conducted to increase and enhance visibility for these products and their food systems.



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FAO. 2018. *Linking people, places and products. A guide for promoting quality linked to geographical origin and sustainable geographical indications.* Rome. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/i1760e/i1760e.pdf>).



For more information:

FAO GIAHS Programme: www.fao.org/giahs/en/

FAO GI: <https://www.fao.org/geographical-indications/en>

Slow Food Presidia: www.fondazione Slow Food.com/en/what-we-do/slow-food-presidia/

