Policy Briefing

'Taking back control': Developing Protected Food Names post-Brexit: What can we learn from GI use internationally?

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The phrase 'taking back control' has been part of the rhetoric of the Brexit debate in the UK conveying the notion of sovereignty regained. However, in terms of Geographical Indications of Origin (GIs) for food and drink products, the post-EU era will actually be the first time that the UK has had the opportunity to develop an independent national policy approach to GIs. Here, we draw on the literature on international policy transfer and global experience of implementing GI policies to identify lessons for the new Protected Food Names (PFN) scheme in the UK and other economies developing GIs for the first time.

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Lessons for PFNs

We review the international experience of implementing GIs for food and drink products. This suggests a number of areas in which policy development may be feasible within the PFN structure:

- Internationally, GIs have been developed with very different policy objectives such as supporting smaller producers (China, Japan, Austria), improving food quality and distinctiveness (Morocco, Brazil, Taiwan), supporting food safety (China), boosting exports (Mongolia), and reshaping supply chains (Columbia). What will be the objectives of UK PFN policy in future years?

- The UK currently has relatively few GIs compared to other European economies. To some extent reflects a bottom-up approach to GI development pre-Brexit and a permissive rather than enabling public policy stance. How actively will PFNs be promoted in future?

- Many countries combine regional or local agencies with national strategies to drive GI development and implementation. Policy in the UK has tended to be strongly centralised in the past. Is there a stronger role for regional and local actors in promoting PFNs in the future?

Understanding GIs

Geographical Indications or GIs are a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin. International policy learning or transfer has been critical to the development of GIs globally, with European agencies, consultancies and standards institutions playing an important role in guiding GI policy development. The new UK GI scheme is called Protected Food Names (see Figure 1)

Figure 1: PFN Logos

International experience emphasises GIs' role in food policy and issues such as food quality, sustainability and innovation as well as producer welfare. GIs have also been considered, however, as supporting traditional foods and therefore nations' intangible cultural heritage and related tourism benefits. This suggests the potential value of GIs as part of a rural or tourism development policy. GIs can also be used to stimulate technical and social innovation. Technical innovations may contribute to product quality and sustainability while social innovations can empower producers within local networks and supply chains.

Policy implications

Post-Brexit, the new PFN scheme represents a significant policy opportunity for the UK. Implementing a more proactive policy towards GIs could have substantial benefits for producers, particularly in an era in which the UK seeks to re-orient its export activity away from Europe. As part of such an approach government could, for example, partner with producer associations or other food groups to identify candidate products for PFN status.

Promoting awareness of PFNs among consumers and producers will also be important given the relatively low level of consumer recognition in the UK. One approach here might be through food quality and marketing competitions which have proved a valuable promotional activity in other countries.

Full paper link: https://www.enterpriseresearch.ac.uk/our-work/publications/