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Protected status helps cheese

The increasing popularity of special regional foods has helped soften the impact of the economic crisis for Swiss farmers. Labels aimed at protecting and promoting regional products, including cheese, bread, as well as certain fruits, vegetables and spices were first introduced in Switzerland more than ten years ago.

The producers of Tête de Moine (Monk's head) cheese have been going from strength to strength with sales figures increasing by 50 per cent over the past decade. Just over 2,150 tons of the typical cheese from the Jura region was sold in 2010.

Tête de Moine is now among the top five Swiss export cheeses. The increase comes despite stagnation over the past three years as markets were hit by the strong Swiss franc and the global economic crisis. Since last December the Jura cheese and other Swiss products have benefited from an additional deal between Switzerland and the European Union - its main export market. Under the agreement both sides recognise each other's special food labels.

Responsible for the success story of Tête de Moine is the Protected Designation of Origin label (PDO) launched in 2001. It ap-

pears that the labels are advantageous for product marketing. A PDO or PGI [protected geographical indication] product has its characteristic and its history which set it apart from standardised products.

The main Swiss export product with a special label is cheese, while other protected products face more difficulties on the international market, notably because of their high prices. But this goes for agricultural products from Switzerland in general.

At the moment only dried meat from the Graubünden region has conquered a notable market share abroad with about 850 tons out of 1,850 tons annual production designated for the export market.

The label can also be beneficial for domestic marketing as the cases of the Saucisson Vaudois (a type of sausage from the Vaud region) and the dried meat from the Valais region show. After these products were granted the PGI label in 2004 sales went up by 60 per cent. These special labels are not necessarily subject to a product standardisation, but they help to improve the level of quality and eliminate undesirable producers.

Record breaking suspension bridge opens

Europe's longest suspension bridge for walkers has been inaugurated in the central Swiss resort area of Sattel-Hochstuckli.

The so-called Skywalk, 374 metres long and 90 centimetres wide, has just been opened to the public. It is suspended from four cables, each 5cm thick, and bridges a stream 50 metres below.

The bridge is at a height of about 1200 metres above sea level, and can be reached by cable car. It is practicable by prams and wheelchairs and will be open



Skywalk suspension bridge

all year round. Construction cost about SFr1.5 million. *swissinfo*

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