

PRESS RELEASE

OriGIIn welcomes the conclusions of the WTO Panel on the European system of geographical indications

OriGIIn is particularly happy that the Panel recognizes that a geographical indication can coexist with an existing trademark. The WTO also enshrines that non-EU producers may benefit from the European Union extensive protection regime for geographical indications

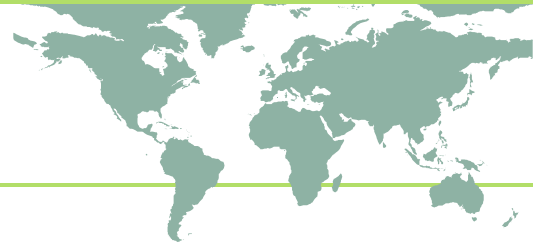
Geneva, 15 March 2005. OriGIIn, the International network of Geographical Indications' producers, welcomes the conclusions of the WTO Panel on EU Regulation 2081/92 relating to the protection of geographical indications. OriGIIn members consider that through this decision, the WTO is opening the way to a greater recognition of the role that geographical indications can play towards local communities around the world.

Pedro Echeverría, President of OriGIIn, declared: *"We are delighted that the WTO clearly recognises the validity of the protection granted to geographical indications in the European Union. We are particularly happy that it allows for the coexistence between a geographical indication and existing trademarks. This is vital for producers around the world who have been making their products for sometime hundred of years, but often face abuses of their GI name"*.

The absence of sufficient legal protection of GIs has allowed companies to free ride on the reputation and image of typical products and to abuse consumers on the true origin of the products. There are numerous examples of such abuses, such as: "Parma ham" produced in Canada, "Rasmati" rice from the United States, "Napa" wines from outside of California, "Manchego" cheese produced in Argentina, "Antigua" coffee from Brazil, Turrón de Alicante from Mexico, Argane oil produced outside of Morocco, etc.

In addition, the WTO Panel confirms that the European system for geographical indications must be fully open to non-EU producers. As a result, the European Community has to clarify certain aspects of its legislation to allow producers from third countries to register their GI name.

Pedro Echeverria noted: *"The EU has a unique system of GI protection. By opening it to the rest of the world, it will greatly contribute to the promotion of this intellectual property tool. GIs are different from trademarks and some of their characteristics make them an excellent local development tool. In particular, GIs bring important added value to the local economy, prevent the relocation of production and help preserving the biodiversity. We now hope that many other WTO Members will follow that route and set up a specific system for GI protection in their country"*.



OriGIN has been calling on WTO Members to enhance the protection of geographical indications in the context of the Doha round. OriGIN members consider that all GI products should be treated in a non-discriminatory manner in the WTO framework. Concretely, this means that the Doha negotiations should lead to the extension of the protection only granted today to wines and spirits by Article 23 of the TRIPs Agreement to all GI products alike. This is very important to producers in many developing countries who do not produce wines and spirits. WTO negotiations should also provide for the establishment of a legally binding multilateral register open to all GI products.

Pedro Echeverria concluded: *“Through this panel ruling, the WTO recognizes that geographical indications deserve to be protected even if a existing trademark exists. However, it is clear that GI producers need more legal certainty, which means a fair and better protection of geographical indications at the international level. Concrete progress on this file will determine WTO Members’ ability to meet their Doha commitments to provide for a genuine Development Agenda.”*

For more information, please contact David Thual, Secretary General of OriGIN at the following phone number: +32.497.42.07.69; E-mail: info@origin-gi.com; Website: www.origin-gi.com

OriGIN is the first international network of Geographical Indications’ producers. Launched in June 2003, OriGIN represents producers in excess of one million from all over the world: Africa, Asia, North and South America, Eastern and Western Europe. OriGIN promotes Geographical Indication as a development tool, in particular through direct partnerships between producers. It also lobbies in favour of better protection of Geographical Indications at the international level.