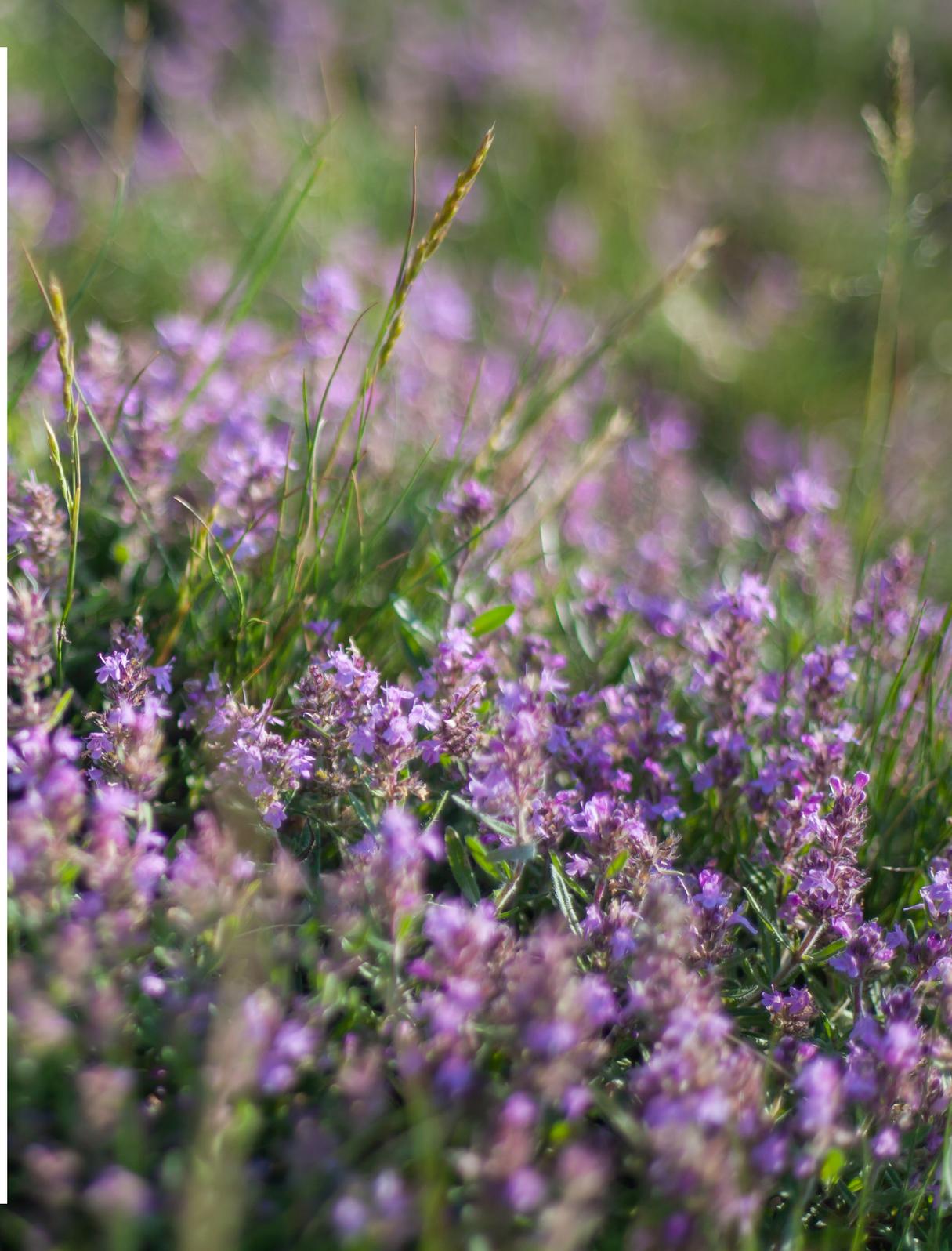


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**POLICY
BRIEF**

Mediterranean forests abound with wild food products with unique and exclusive properties



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POLICY
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Mediterranean forests abound with wild food products (WFP) with unique and exclusive properties. A significant proportion of the people living in this region harvest and consume WFP, yet the full commercial potential of these products has not been unlocked. As demand for WFP continues to grow, aspects such as local production, sustainability and social value added attract more and more attention from conscientious consumers.

In this respect, **WFP can make significant contributions to smart, inclusive bio-based economies and to development of the rural Mediterranean region**, provided they are addressed in a sensible manner. This means ensuring that: (a) the definition, classification and regulation of these products is improved; (b) innovative solutions for quality, safety and sustainability are verified and upscaled; (c) marketing strategies that are conscious of the environment, social and governance (ESG) issues are promoted; (d) integrative organizational structures and business models are developed.

- ✓ **Wild food products are strongly connected to the local economies, rural livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, traditional knowledge, territorial identity, gastronomy and other cultural values.**
- ✓ **Sustainable use of wild food products contributes to the conservation of Mediterranean forests.**

WildFood project has taken steps forward in promoting **innovative joint strategies** with the aim of improving quality and safety controls and sustainable production at all stages of the value chains of selected WFP - pine nuts, acorns, truffles and aromatic plants - in the Mediterranean area. **Agroforestry is an important source of semi-wild foods and an alternative to wild harvesting** that can help to mitigate pressures on natural populations and to improve WFP value chains. However, further steps are needed to advance towards the sustainable growth of the WFP sector and its vast contributions to the green economy and rural development.

This policy brief outlines **four pathways** to improve the value-chains of the Wild Food Products, promote the sustainable growth of the sector and contribute to the **green economy** and **rural development**. These pathways are primarily based on findings from the PRIMA **WildFood** project and previous EU-funded projects.



Wild food products: definition, classification and regulation

Gathering wild foods is one of the oldest human activities; however, the lack of clarity in what is considered a wild food product in European and international standards completely marginalises them, affecting especially the primary sector. Hence, the **WildFood project** suggests the following definition:

Wild food products are untended biological resources used as food and obtained from gathering activity in forests and other land.

A semi-wild food product has been subjected to some form of human intervention to increase productivity which may be considered an agricultural activity.

✓ **Gathering wild foods is one of the oldest human activities. However, its concept as economic activity and how is classified in the economy are still undefined.**

These products face other challenges:

- The domestication of WFP is increasing moving from forest to agricultural activity; however, the plantations of semi-WFP are often considered forests with an associated excess of constraints and restrictions. In this sense, **there is an immediate need to include these plantations within the agricultural activities and be considered as farm production.** However, not all products included under the umbrella of WFP match this need and an in-depth individualised discussion is needed.
- The European Customs Code does not include codes suitable for monitoring food products for the sector. **The introduction of specific codifications and new customs codes for wild food species, is essential to better organise, monitor and analyse this sector.**
- The sector has a high degree of informality due to the unsophisticated taxation systems applied differently among European Countries. The formalization of the sector is intimately linked to the innovation of tax policies. **A zero or low taxation system, coordinated with traceability documents, must consider the needs of the primary producers, and not negatively impact them.**



Quality, safety and sustainability in wild food products value-chains

The large number of products, uses, and markets of the WFP leads to complex supply chains that are difficult to trace and monitor from the sources to the consumers. **Innovative traceability and control systems are needed to improve quality, safety, sustainability, and due diligence** at all stages of the value-chains. Recommended policy actions are:

- **Support research and development to trace sustainable sourcing of wild food products and production methods for semi-wild food products.** This would include inventories and monitoring systems, innovative procedures to record quantitative information on collection and trade, and adequate and realistic monitoring procedures to ensure sustainable harvests.
- **Promote ready-to-use techniques and development of new innovations to improve quality and safety in WFP value-chains.** This includes systems for risks analysis and critical control points, food safety standards, production innovations, harvesting mechanization monitoring, improvements in manipulation process, pest control, maintenance of equipment and installations, storage, packaging and transport.
- **Build capacity on innovative techniques to increase quality, safety and sustainability** targeted at different actors at different stages of value chains.
- **Develop adjusted certification schemes ensuring quality and safety.** New certification schemes and adapted standards to WFPs can be valuable tools for ensuring quality and safety, as well as providing consumers with the information they need to make informed purchasing decisions.

✓ **Innovations need to be supported with tailored-made training and capitalization actions to increase impact to a wider audience and thereby increase quality, safety and sustainability in Mediterranean wild food value chains.**



Marketing strategies for wild food products

Targeted innovative marketing strategies that include such tactics as **certification, labelling and branding** for WFP can increase their market value, popularity and consumption while also promoting sustainable and responsible harvesting practices. Policy action is recommended to:

- Encourage **creation of a group certification for WFPs** (joint various certifications systems, i.e., organic, fairtrade...) to facilitate the process and increase opportunities for enterprises and smallholders to access new markets.
- Support the implementation of **labelling standards, especially among rural producers** to facilitate WFP visibility and competitiveness of small businesses and to dismantle the international confusion by trades between species and products.
- Promote cooperation among producers by creating **unique branding and packaging** to help distinguish local products from others and increase companies' recognition in the marketplace, while combating trafficking across international borders and promoting transparency and accountability in supply chains.
- Facilitate development of **capacity building campaigns** to increase the skills of the workforce and be ready to meet the challenges represented by the future labelling and certification schemes.

✓ **Certification and labelling provide transparency regarding the safety of wild food, the improvement of working conditions and the protection of forests and biodiversity.**



Integration strategies and adapted business models in the wild food sector

Considering acute problems such as exploitation of natural resources, environmental degradation, energy demand and social and economic inequalities, companies are more than ever under pressure to pursue sustainability. Enlightened **companies are compelled to move from firm-centric to a network-embedded operational model that cares about environment, social and governance aspects**. In the context of wild food products, business practices are highly heterogeneous and non-transparent, especially regarding harvesting, trade, and labelling. Recommendations for policy actions are:

- Facilitate **cooperation among stakeholders** at the different stages of the WFP value chains, especially among smallholders and rural businesses, by promoting innovative networks, living labs, virtual platforms, among other ways of joint participation and collaboration.
- Foster **public-private alliances and multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships and agreements** in the WFP sector to develop **innovative business models offering economic opportunities in rural areas**.
- **Redefine business models** in terms of contributing to sustainability, considering **social inclusion and rural entrepreneurship, and a fair distribution of costs** with a special focus on primary producers.

- ✓ **The connection among a wide range of stakeholders (primary producers, farmers, foresters, industry, processors, advisors, government, etc.) can facilitate joint development of a portfolio of research and innovation priorities in the Mediterranean area.**
- ✓ **Strengthened cooperation will allow for development and promotion of business models that contribute to fair distribution of costs, benefits and risks amongst the economic operators, with a focus on the primary producers.**





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The Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area will devise new R&I approaches to improve water availability and sustainable agriculture production in a region heavily distressed by climate change, urbanization and population growth.