

Increased interest in cooperatives products by retailers and food caterers

MILESTONE REPORT- INRAT



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Awareness and Interest of Retailers and Food Caterers in cooperative products

This milestone report is part of the MountainHER project, which seeks to empower women-led cooperatives in mountainous regions by enhancing their visibility, improving access to markets, and promoting traditional food products. The initiative operates within the context of rural transformation, gender inclusion, and sustainable food systems, especially in areas facing climatic and socio-economic challenges. This report aims to demonstrate how retailers and food caterers have become aware of and shown interest in traditional foods through the cooperatives' digital and market activities. The analysis focuses on six participating countries: Croatia, Italy, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon and Algeria (Summary table).

Overview of MountainHER

The PRIMA program (Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area) is a Euro-Mediterranean initiative approved by the European Parliament and the European Council, aiming to establish a structured and long-term partnership on research and innovation in the Mediterranean region. It focuses on three main thematic areas: water management, sustainable farm management under Mediterranean environmental constraints, and sustainable agri-food value chains for regional and local development. The program is supported by the Horizon 2020 framework of the European Union.

The PRIMA MountainHER project, active in six countries (Italy, Croatia, Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia), is titled "Empowering women associations as drivers for agroecological transformation to generate income for Mountain farming communities ". Among its many interdependent activities, the project also includes the creation and promotion of mountain products made from locally grown cereals, cultivated in harmony with nature. MountainHER aims at taking advantage of these nascent marketing opportunities in an agroecological food system approach "from farm to fork" to empower rural women associations to become true drivers for social and economic change.

MountainHER aims to equip women with the education, resources, and support networks needed to successfully start and sustain their own businesses. By leveraging local traditions and resources, the project empowers women to create enterprises that not only provide financial stability but also help preserve cultural heritage. A key focus is placed on barley and wheat cultivation, as these grains play a fundamental role in local diets and traditions. Through MountainHER, participants gain expertise in modernizing farming techniques, improving productivity, and developing innovative products such as bread, pastries, and artisanal cereals.

Awareness among retailers and food caterers: digital visibility and online engagement

CROATIA

In Croatia, the cooperative 'Power of Mountains' has shown promising results in improving its online visibility and market reach. With 28 direct purchases and 44 online orders, the cooperative is gaining traction both locally and digitally. Its Facebook page has 598 followers, 510 likes, and 573 website visits, reflecting a growing public interest in cooperative products. Although Instagram activity is still

minimal, the 628 total website or shop visits indicate a meaningful digital engagement. Retailers and food caterers have shown curiosity, and the cooperative's enhanced digital presence demonstrates awareness and potential for future partnerships.

ITALY

In Italy, cooperative under the MountainHER project have achieved significant visibility and market awareness. With 235 direct purchases and 10 online orders, as well as 10,931 website clicks and 99,356 impressions in the past year, the results show strong digital engagement. The social media performance is equally robust, with 4,662 Facebook followers, 1,352 Instagram followers, and 173 LinkedIn followers. The cooperative has received requests from three stores, ten bars, and five restaurants, although production levels remain insufficient to meet demand. The interest has increased notably following pop-up restaurant events, showing that consumer and professional engagement is steadily growing.

MOROCCO

Morocco's cooperative have demonstrated substantial progress in both online and offline activities. Direct purchases included 270 kg of couscous and 1,000 plant units, while online sales reached 585 kg of couscous and 2,300 plants. Digital visibility is also improving, with 1,138 website visits, 4,500 total web interactions, and 4,000 social media reach points. The cooperative has attracted around 650 new followers, indicating expanding awareness and interest from both consumers and professional buyers. These figures reflect an effective digital strategy and growing market recognition for cooperative products.

TUNISIA

In Tunisia, cooperative have made meaningful progress in digital transformation. With 324 visits to cooperative websites and presence on three social media platforms, their online visibility is steadily improving. The cooperative has gained 167 new followers, showing a gradual rise in audience engagement. These results indicate an emerging awareness among retailers and food caterers about cooperative products. The interest has increased notably following open day cooperative, showing that retailers and food caterers' engagement is steadily growing. Further investment in storytelling, cross-platform communication, and digital marketing training would help increase reach and convert awareness into sales.

Lebanon

In Lebanon, the cooperative digital presence has expanded to two social media platforms, gaining 340 followers and establishing an initial online audience. While data on website visits is not yet available, this online activity signals growing awareness among consumers and professional food actors. Given Lebanon's vibrant food culture and hospitality industry, social media provides an ideal platform for cooperatives to connect with retailers and caterers. The current results demonstrate early but tangible progress in promoting women-led cooperative products.

ALGERIA

In Algeria, although comprehensive statistics are not yet available, interest from retailers and food caterers in MountainHER products has clearly increased, particularly as a result of the awareness and promotional events organized under the project, such as the Open Day and other local exhibitions.

Summary Table. Orders and Online Engagement per Country

Country	Direct Orders / Purchases in Cooperative	Online Product Orders	Total Orders	Website Visits	Social Media Reach	New Followers / Subscribers
Croatia	28	44	72	573	1 social media	598
Italy	235	10	245	10,931 website clicks; 923 shop views	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn	3,674 (1,352 IG + 2,149 FB + 173 LinkedIn)
Morocco	270 kg Couscous + 1,000 plant units	585 kg Couscous + 2,300 plant units	855 kg Couscous + 3,300 plant units	4,500	4,000 reach points	650
Tunisia	—	—	—	324	3 social media	167
Lebanon	—	—	—	—	2 social media	340
Algeria	—	—	—	—	—	— (qualitative growth observed)

CONCLUSION

Across the six countries, the MountainHER project has successfully enhanced the visibility and digital identity of women-led cooperatives. Italy, Croatia and Morocco lead in digital engagement and sales, showing strong integration between online promotion and market demand. Tunisia have established solid foundations, with clear increases in website visits and follower growth. Lebanon's growing online presence reflects early but promising progress toward engaging the food sector. Overall, all cooperatives are experiencing increased awareness from retailers and caterers, though the degree of maturity varies. The continued development of digital skills, cross-country knowledge exchange, and targeted outreach to professional food networks will be crucial to sustaining and scaling these achievements.

