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Heritage, Diversity of Structures, Dynamics of Movement

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/2751>

DOI: 10.4000/rga.2751

ISSN: 1760-7426

This article is a translation of:

La coopération laitière dans la montagne française - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/2739>
[fr]

Publisher:

Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine, UGA Éditions/Université Grenoble Alpes

Electronic reference

Daniel Ricard, "Dairy Cooperatives in the French Mountains", *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [Online], 103-1 | 2015, Online since 29 June 2015, connection on 08 December 2022.
URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/2751> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.2751>

This text was automatically generated on 8 December 2022.

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- 1 Cooperation is widespread in Europe and has been firmly established in some areas (Scandinavia, for example) and with regard to the production of certain goods (cereal, milk, vegetables and wine, among others). In the French mountain region, it is strongly represented by the dairy sector. Our goal here is to sketch a general overview of the dairy cooperatives across the French mountain region, and this process needs to be approached from two angles. The first draws heavily on history to understand the development of this movement and its functional and regional differentiations. The second combines geography and economics to better understand the current mountain cooperative system: its importance, operation, successes and failures. We will then focus on the geographical locations and territorial differences we pick up, and there will be plenty! We will also seek to identify any specific features of these dairy cooperatives. Are there *mountain* cooperatives, in other words ones that are different from those on the plain? Or are they simply *in the mountains*, and does this location not play any role in their operation or their efficiency?
- 2 In terms of the methodology, the process of describing and explaining dairy cooperatives in the mountains and examining the specifics of the cooperative movement at higher altitudes requires two kinds of knowledge: one about the cooperative system and the other about the dairy sector. Both broadly relate to economic geography but inevitably borrow from other disciplines, including history. Such knowledge is typically acquired in scientific (or geographical, historical) literature, but this source of information is not sufficient, because the information must also be continually maintained by reading the trade press and especially by means of field surveys, as this sector is constantly changing, and each company has trajectories that are often complex. These will be the methodological bases of this

article, which will evidently focus on businesses, and in particular on cooperatives: their history, development, activities, territorial boundaries, and so forth.

Dairy cooperatives in the mountains: establishment in phases

- 3 We identified 239 dairy cooperative sites in the French mountains, all of which developed out of three successive stages of establishment that relate to three design and operational approaches.

Origins: the *fruitières*¹ of the Jura

- 4 Dairy cooperation developed as early as the 13th century with *fruitières* in the Jura. This would be the oldest French cooperative system, and it has heavily influenced the transformation of cheese production in the country. It is said to have taken form in Levier, where a text attests to the presence of a *fruitière* as early as 1264. The original flavour of these associations, which emphasise the “fruit” of the herd, centres on these humid plateaus that are favourable to grass and are located inside the Doubs and Jura departments, between 600 and 800 meters above sea level.
- 5 The number of *fruitières* multiplied at the same time there was an increase in the raising of dairy cattle in Franche-Comté, especially from the late 18th century onwards (Boichard, 1977). Northern Doubs and Bugey were only affected at the end of 19th century (Lebeau, 1955), and the movement advanced in the direction of the Saône plain, Bresse, Haute-Saône and Bassigny in the *fruitière* area (pôle) of Cl. Delfosse (2007).
- 6 These associations have increasingly moved from an archaic system to a more structured organisation. Originally, the “turn” was characteristic of a mutual loan of milk: For one day, depending on individual contributions, the milk of all the members of the *fruitière* and the collective pot was at the disposal of the farmer. He worked at home, kept the manufactured products, and the records showed whose “turn” it was next. The first change followed the hiring of a salaried cheese maker, especially in the 19th century with the arrival of Swiss professionals who circulated Gruyère and Emmental cheeses. The second was the progressive decline of the “turn” after 1850. The *fruitière* kept the cheeses that it had refined and sold by itself and, by the end of the century, it could pay the milk every month. The third change was the creation of modern manufacturing chalets, which increased between 1875 and 1900.
- 7 With regard to this innovative movement, one has to keep in mind its vigour, sustainability and operations in an area characterised by collective practices, technical (it helped to improve the *Vachelin*, which would become the *Comté*, a *Gruyère* cheese) and economic efficiency (it valorised milk and created a whole local dynamic). Vigour, effectiveness, local roots, historical depth and cohesion of players: Everything came together for this dynamic to continue.

The dairy cooperative to conquer the Alps

- 8 The *fruitières* colonised the Alps, but in a different way. They first appeared shortly after 1800 (Arbos, 1922 Guérin, 1972; Vuichard, 1989) but were the result of a dynamic

from Switzerland and were initially created in the lower valley of the Arve, near Geneva. The roots of the movement were external, unlike in the Jura. The *fruitière* operated according to the “turn” system and employed a salaried cheese maker from the beginning, but it remained inefficient until about 1850. The area then turned to milk production and, following the 1860 annexation of Savoy, the new French administration started to subsidise these *fruitières*, whose number soared: 40 in the Haute-Savoie department in 1860, 260 in 1880, 437 at most in 1907 (Vuichard 1989). The use of the “turn” declined and chalets multiplied, but the great originality came from the emergence, in 1870, of the sale of milk to local artisans. This “indirect management”, which concerned more than 80% of the *fruitières* as early as 1906, then linked a cooperative, which collected, with a *fruitier* who bought the milk by the year and transformed it for himself in the workshop he rented out to the *fruitière*.

- 9 Making its way from the hinterland, the *fruitière* reached the Alps, but not without difficulties, because it required a constant supply that was lacking at the point where the mountain pasture starts. Therefore, it hardly reached Chablais and Aravis, both meccas for *Abondance* and *Reblochon* cheeses, as well as the Grandes Alpes, to the point that Beaufortain and Belledonne ignored these associations in 1914. However, Queyras (from 1840-1850) and the Bauges (1872) were more receptive (Arbos, 1922).
- 10 Thus, the setting up of a *fruitière* in the Alps was not as uniform as in the Jura and, in particular, it was the functioning of the system characterising this unique form of cooperation that left considerable space for the private sector.

The dissemination of the traditional cooperative system

- 11 Cooperatives gradually spread to other mountain areas, with varying degrees of success and in various ways but almost always while favouring direct management.
- 12 From the Second French Empire onwards, the state encouraged the creation of cooperatives in the Pyrenees and the non-Savoy Alps, particularly in the Hautes-Alpes (including Valgaudemar, Champsaur and Briançonnais), but these often disappeared as soon as the subsidies ended: By 1930, not a single one remained in the Pyrenees (Ricard, 1993)! The impetus came from above, and since it was not possible to appropriate the project for oneself, this early local development failed.
- 13 The dynamic was stronger in Cantal, where several cooperatives emerged near Saignes (in the north-west of the department) and especially on the Saint-Flour *planèze*, mostly after 1920. In 1946, A. Durand listed 63 of them in the Cantal Mountains alone, and there were 72 at their historical highpoint in 1961 (Ricard, 1993). This time, the move came from below and did so despite the difficulties, which included the crisis period of the 1930s and World War II.
- 14 Other cooperatives emerged in the Alpes-Maritimes, where the Riviera’s urban demand increased while production development possibilities were low, because of a lack of pasture. Therefore, they returned to the valleys in search of milk, and several associations were created, the first in Roquebillière as early as 1888 (Arbos, 1922). In 1933, 10 of these cooperatives created the Nice Central Dairy, which collected and then heated the milk before selling it.

New cooperatives

- 15 After 1945, urban growth all over France stimulated demand, and private or cooperative dairies then began to collect, package and sell to this new clientele. Before the arrival of UHT (in the 1960s), it was necessary to be close to the consumer in order to sell this (sterilised, pasteurised ...) milk, because it was very perishable. Some cooperatives were created in La Mure, Oyonnax, Rodez, Clermont-Ferrand and Besançon, while others arose from the organisation of supplies during the war, such as in Carmaux. The one in Err, in the French Cerdagne, dispatched its products to Perpignan via the “Yellow Train”. There is yet another dimension regarding Saint-Etienne, Grenoble and Lyon, where several cooperatives specialised in the sale of milk and fresh products and gathered together as early as 1964 to form the Orlac regional union, which built one of the biggest French cooperative organisation in Vienne (Isère). The same year, Orlac created Sodima along with other regional unions and would manage the *Candia* and *Yoplait* brands. The increase in demand and effectiveness of the cooperative improved production from Le Puy to Valromey and from Dijon to Trièves, and the Monts du Lyonnais became one of the fastest-growing dairy regions in the French Alps. This dairy momentum that developed around Orlac was essential for the movement of mountain cooperatives. It owed much to leaders of agriculture in the post-war period (F. Michon, A. Genin, L. Réocreux...) who were formed by the JAC (Christian Agricultural Youth) and/or farm unions, and for whom cooperation is one of the pillars of agricultural development.
- 16 The development of these cooperatives benefited from the agricultural revolution and the CAP (1962). Their collection then increased considerably and, along the way, they often promoted drinking milk and fresh products. Other cooperatives, more plainly situated in the mountains, chose cheese, for example Centre Lait, which opened a cheddar plant in Aurillac in 1962 and dealt with the Italian and (from 1966 to 1968) Auvergne cheeses. In Besançon, the Union Agricole Comtoise (UAC) did the same, but the *Comté* world was still difficult to penetrate. The Union Laitière Vittelaise (ULV) of Bulgnéville chose soft cheeses: *Munster* and *Emmental*.
- 17 All these cooperatives valued large volumes and quickly surpassed the activities of traditional structures. Their emergence created a real break. They did not work on a village-based structure and often had their headquarters in the city (Aurillac, Gap, Besançon, Carmaux, Rodez, Oyonnax, Auzances) or close to the mountains (Grenoble, Lyon, Clermont-Ferrand, Belfort). They made cheese, UHT milk and yoghurt in factories, some of which soon processed more than 100 million litres per year. Small-scale production disappeared, and the mountain character itself started to be questioned. In the Rhône-Alpes in particular, they collected indiscriminately in the mountain, and on the plain, their factories were placed based on communication routes, accessibility to urban markets and the configuration of a collection basin bisected (because why not?) by the borders of the mountain area.

Map 1: Dairy cooperatives in the French mountains: the stages of establishment

SOURCES: PERSONAL SURVEYS.

Mountain cooperatives: current state of play

Map 2: French mountain cooperatives in 2014

SOURCES: PERSONAL SURVEYS.

- 18 While mapping companies is essential for an understanding of the subject, it is very difficult, because one quickly faces a delicate collection of individual data and the complexity of situations. One of the first difficulties comes from the mismatch between firms' collection areas and the mountain area: Thus, around Lyon, Sodiaal collects regardless of the altitude, and the 3A (now Sodiaal) cooperative drains the bulk of Pyrenean milk to its plants in Pau and Toulouse, while Berria in Macaye collects in the Basque Country and on the plains. In the Jura, the extremely restrictive delimitation of the mountain area that runs through the middle of the first plateau excludes multiple units that in fact come from a mountain system. Lastly, the milk of the remaining cooperative members in the Vosges is systematically transformed on the plains. Another difficulty is the numerous individual cases. Some structures have become collection cooperatives that sell to manufacturers in a relationship that is different from that of indirect management. Furthermore, cooperation is experiencing a continual restructuring whose topicality is difficult to follow. The difficulty also comes from the quantitative assessment of the activity of these cooperatives. Map no. 2 is based on first-hand data or close assessments from various compilations and the decadeslong monitoring of the activity of these companies. It emphasizes some astonishing regional differences that stem from historical as well as recent developments in the sector.

The Jura, home of the direct management of cooperatives

- 19 By its very local governance and its ability to ensure the collection and processing, and sometimes the maturing, the *fruitière* is a kind of archetypal cooperative. Its

concentration is at its highest in the centre and the north of the Jura, with tens of units, systematically oriented towards dairy. They are maintained thanks to the value provided by the AOC cheeses, themselves linked to the specifications' effectiveness (*Comté*, *Morbier*, *Mont d'Or*, *Bleu de Gex* and the IGP *Gruyère*). The inter-branch organisations managing these AOCs (or IGP), controlled by means of cooperation, have considered the maintenance of the *fruitière* to be essential, and the *Comté* has even limited its collection area by a circle of 25 km in diameter (decree of 1998) in order to maintain a certain density of workshops. This desire to preserve the artisanal *fruitière* is unique in the world of AOC. While restructuring has been driven by the legacy of many small, non-viable units and promoted by the "Charter of the *Comté*"², workshops (the *Moussières*, *Morbier*, *Mignovillard*, *Doubs*...) or even cooperatives (*Montbéliard*) are created, and the Jura is still home to 121 traditional *fruitières* that collect, produce and sell to maturers.

- 20 The other reference area of "direct management" is the Savoy mountain region, connected to the *Beaufort* cheese. The movement only dates to 1960 and is based on 10 high-performance cooperatives (these are not *fruitières*), including those of *Beaufort*, *Moûtiers* and *Bourg-Saint-Maurice*. The dynamics, completed by pastoral groups that transform into pasture during the summer, resemble those of the Jura: a well-conducted AOC, a very strong cooperative feeling and economic success that protects restructuring.
- 21 Elsewhere, the story is different. In the southern Alps, cooperatives have been victims of UHT milk quotas and a difficult natural environment: Only one remains, in *Barcelonnette*. In the Pyrenees, there are only *Berria* in the Basque Country and the *Err* cooperative, which simply sells its milk to a Spanish (Catalan) colleague. In *Cantal*, only five dairies are still independent in this stronghold of cooperation that the *planèzes* used to be. In fact, the *a minima* specification of their AOC enabled the industrialisation of workshops, and they were soon confronted with (private or cooperative) cheese dairies that were too competitive. With difficulty, some play the card of qualitative differentiation in *Valuéjols* (near *Saint-Flour*) and *Saint-Bonnet de Salers* (near *Mauriac*).

The erosion of the "indirect management" of the Savoy

- 22 Some cooperatives have moved on to "indirect management" in the *Bugey*, *Bauges* and *Chablais*, and even in the Jura around *Philippe*, the cheese maker, but this old system of delegation of the transformation to the private remains the concern of the Savoy hinterland. However, the map reveals its spectacular concentration. In *Haute-Savoie*, where *L. Vuichard* found 437 units in 1907, we now see only 21. Erosion came first as a result of the overabundance of these small structures that were poorly equipped and rarely up to standard, but other factors also explain the concentration. On the one hand, many *fruitières* had difficulty maintaining their legal structure and investing in efficient and attractive buildings for *fruitiers*. On the other hand, they restructured, with the emergence of some large *fruitiers* (*Chabert*, *Verdannot*, *Masson*...), who themselves seek to streamline the processing tools and create their own workshop, thus gaining independence. Finally, new *fruitiers* arrived. In *Poncin* (*Ain*), producers have entrusted the management of their workshop to *Sodiaal* and, after the *Lactalis* group retook the *Société Laitière des Hauts de Savoie* (*SLHS*, which included the "Les

Fermiers Savoyards” cooperative of Frangy), the Lactalis group, which is one of the world's leading dairy groups, has become a *fruitier* in Samoëns and Fétèrnes, even more so than Evian! Several million litres of milk processed as *Abondance* and *Reblochon* cheese versus billions around the world: The system has changed in nature.

- 23 Dairy cooperatives in the hinterland therefore appear less robust, less efficient and more withdrawn than those in the Jura. Group dynamics, while present, are less pervasive in this territory, as *fruitières* have put in place a system in which cooperation is ultimately confined to milk collection, the key activity of private manufacturing.³

The new generation of dairy cooperatives in the mountains

- 24 The map also shows the weight of the new cooperatives. They have very few industrial locations : 15 on the Massif Central, and fewer than 10 in the country's central-east.⁴ Some are located on the plain and do little more than collect in the mountain: Vienne, Pau, Brioude, Gerzat near Clermont-Ferrand... These factories come from (even fewer) multisite groups that have kept on expanding. The founders of Sodiaal were mountaineers, but the company is now controlled from Paris, according to a pattern that brings it closer to the large cooperatives in northern Europe. In short, it is far from the Massif Central and the village cooperatives. The other groups located in the mountains are the Fromageries de l'Ermitage (centred around the cooperative of Bulgnéville in the Vosges), which are now well established in the Jura; Eurial in Nantes (in 2014, the second French dairy cooperative took over the Valcrest Union, based in Crest, Drôme); Breton Laïta, which manages France Lait along with Sodiaal in Mâcon (*Régilait* milk powder); GLAC (a moribund cooperative from Charente that produces UHT milk near Clermont-Ferrand); and Alsace Lait (via Savoie Yaourt, a specialist in up-market stirred yogurt). In turn, the Monts de Joux act as an entirely mountaineering regional group, installed in the Doubs (Bannans) and forming part of the landscape of the regional AOCs.
- 25 So, what is the relationship between these groups and the mountain region? Ermitage has operated maturing cellars in Rochesson, in the Vosges, for a long time. Its arrival in the AOC of the Jura reinforced this mountain dimension. At Eurial, however, one looks more towards the Great West and the industrial goat cheese from Poitou than towards *Picodon*. Alsace Lait picked a positive regional image at the time of the repurchase of Savoie Yaourt. As for GLAC, the Massif Central is a source of loss, strengthened by the legacy of a poor collection area in the high Ardèche, even if it produces... mountain milk in Saint-Genès Champanelle (near Clermont-Ferrand)!
- 26 Sodiaal was established in 1990 following the merger of six regional unions, two of which (RichesMonts and Orlac) owe much to some great mountain leaders: M. Debatisse (Thiers), L. Réocreux (Pilat), F. Michon (Matheysine), A. Genin (Oisans) and R. Lacombe (Segala). The mountain has always brought such unions very dynamic collection areas (Ségala, Pilat, Monts du Lyonnais, Forez, the Rochefort-Montagne area...), a configuration that was expanded with the recent recovery of many URCVL⁵ producers, as well as the merger with 3A⁶. However, since the recent buyout of Entremont, Sodiaal has looked increasingly towards exports to third countries and China. The economic rationale would command that it focus on its best dairy areas (such as Brittany and Lorraine), but the Monts du Lyonnais and small farms remain one of the cooperative's dynamic cores, a purveyor of directors, even of presidents, and the group still gathers

past Digne, where collection costs defy belief. Business is not everything! The relationship with the mountain often comes about thanks to the AOCs, but Sodiaal seems more at ease with consumer products and leading brands (*Yoplait*, *Candia*, *Entremont* and *RichesMonts*). *RichesMonts* produced *Bleu d'Auvergne*, *Fourme d'Ambert* and *Bleu des Causses*, and the recent buyout of 3A made Sodiaal the leader in Auvergne cheese. It also manufactures *Comté*, *Gruyère* and *Beaufort* and has become the leader in *Comté* maturing with the buyout of *Entremont*. However, it rather seems to be moving out of this niche: It has created a common subsidiary with *Bongrain* (*Compagnie Fromagère & RichesMonts*) and has opened the capital of its maturing subsidiary, *Monts et Terroirs*, to cooperatives in the Jura (25% and soon 35%).

Mountain cooperatives? Cooperatives in the mountains?

- 27 Mountain cooperative? This term would depend on geographical location. It is special because of its mountain aspect. Cooperative in the mountains? It is related to the mountain (or massif) only because of its location, which hardly plays a role in its functioning and economic efficiency.
- 28 In order to better fit the discussion in this special issue of the RGA, we must put our national dairy cooperatives into the national dairy context, which is organised around a powerful interprofession that early on established mechanisms leading to a kind of single price for milk. Of course, the latter is now being undermined, but the price differences remain low among firms, regions and legal statuses. Besides, this is the old union demand from the side of the producers, to which the dairies have adapted themselves. In the end, cooperatives do not reward their members (or at the margin) better; on the contrary, they even suffer a clear lack of equity.⁷
- 29 However, there is a distinction between some of these cooperatives (and some regions) and the rest. They hardly make up 4% of the national collection, but they are then almost always from the mountain. From a price of 330–360 euros / tonne of milk all over France, it rises to 460 euros in the Jura, 520 in the Aubrac, 450 or 500 in Haute-Savoie and up to 700 euros in the *Beaufort* region (personal surveys). This marked success almost always concerns craft structures and overwhelmingly cooperatives. However, no additional “mountain” charge exists within the cooperative dairy groups, unless they are involved in rewarding sectors of the Jura and Savoy (*Bannans*). As for “mountain milk”, if its price is quite high in supermarkets, producers only get a modest bonus from it (i.e. a few euros).
- 30 It is known that the performances quoted above clearly refer to the presence of AOC and IGP based on rigorous specifications, able to preserve the specificity of the products and promote the expression of terroir (Ricard, 1993, 1997, 2012). Use of local breeds, selection of hay against silage, daily collection, rejection of pasteurisation and long maturing are at the foundation of these strategies. Is this a specific positioning of mountain cooperative players? Broadly speaking, yes, it is, because this type of success is hardly ever found exclusively at high altitudes (possibly in Haute-Saône) and concerns sectors that are well mastered and organised by the cooperation (*Comté*, *Beaufort*...). But it also is not, because it is far from concerned with all mountain cooperatives, nor all fields of AOC altitude. Thus, the too imprecise specifications of the

Massif Central do not guarantee this link to terroir, and milk is badly valorised in cooperatives, as well as in the private sector.⁸

- 31 In short, the correlation between mountain cooperation and economic performance remains incomplete, as if we were in the presence of cooperatives (localised) at high altitude that behaved differently depending on the local configurations, as much as companies that would adopt a specific behaviour from this particular location, leading to a particular efficiency across all ranges. Moreover, in the territories identified above, private actors are hardly distinguishable from cooperatives, either in their behaviour or in their effectiveness.
- 32 In fact, higher-altitude cooperatives have adopted two types of behaviours with uneven results.
- 33 Some knew how to (or could) adapt to the demands of a competitive economy by bypassing difficulty. Adaptation is almost always the result of a collective position, at the scale of an AOC sector, with a valuation of the quality that results from actors' willingness to become involved in a rigorous system, the only one able to offer the consumer this "qualitative plus" that justifies the price level. Milk is strongly valorised while capital is generated. The collective dimension of the system is thus enhanced, and cooperatives remain manifold because they compensate for higher production costs through the better selling prices that are also associated with the idea of the *fruitière*. Here we reach the heart of the matter regarding differentiation related to specific quality.
- 34 Others, devoted to the manufacturing of standardised products and having experienced strong volume growth, have entered economic competition more clearly. They have often had to restructure and have been enrolled in industrial logic in which the mountain is a weight (small producers, collection costs, winter stress) rather than a resource (image is not valorised). The map shows that cooperation has not disappeared from these territories, but the workshops have, as in the mountains of Auvergne. The mechanism has gone very far since we have often included the AOC in the same logic of concentration. Some units have tried to differentiate themselves with top-market products but, overall, the cheese cooperative, run in the village, gave way to regional groups, almost all of which (UCFC, 3A, URCVL...) have joined Sodiaal, which now brings together most of the dairy cooperation in the Massif Central.

Conclusion

- 35 There are still 239 dairy cooperatives at high altitudes, and their position in these territories remains essential. They have developed from a series of historical legacies, but the analysis highlights a wide range of situations, economic pressure having led more and more to a differentiation of massifs in recent decades, in line with strategic community choices that mostly date to the 1960s. Nowadays, mountain dairy cooperation shows a multiple reality, sometimes antagonistic, with specific regional configurations that, against the background of a generalised dairy orientation, show a very big difference in the size and functioning of these companies. This delicate question still has to be solved. Mountain cooperatives? Cooperatives in the mountains? The existence of mountain cooperatives seems real but partial. Careful observation makes it possible to assert that there is no single cooperative model on the level of the French massifs. We much rather seem to be facing regional models whose specificity

comes from their association with certain AOC cheeses that are essentially from the mountain, even while they know that all AOCs do not generate the permanence of cooperatives — far from it.

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NOTES

1. *Fruitière* is a local word used for “cooperative” in the Jura and Savoy.
2. In 1970, the ministry, through the Charter of Comté, planned to consolidate the fruitières. This led to the creation of several modern units, in Bannans, Lons and next to Dôle.
3. The Jura is home to some specific cases of indirect management, by way of a few refiners that have partnered with fruitières and the Monts de Joux (Bannans) cooperative, which manages a dozen cooperatives without there being any fusion.
4. Except for Bannans, whose logic is different from that of these groups.
5. The Regional Union of Dairy-Selling Cooperatives (Union Régionale des Coopératives de Vente de Lait) was established in 1956 to sell, in a cohesive manner, to private and cooperative manufacturers in Lyon. After falling victim to the new environment of price volatility, it shut down in 2013, and Sodiaal appropriated a number of these cooperatives.
6. The 3A group was formed in 1988 with the merger of the Pyrenees-Aquitaine-Charente Dairy Union, or ULPAC (l'Union Laitière Pyrénées Aquitaine Charente) and Centre Lait, a Cantal cooperative, which at the time had refused to join Sodiaal.
7. This weakness prevented SODIAAL in 2012 from buying out 50% of its subsidiary Yoplait, which it had been obligated to sell to Paribas AI a few years earlier because of financial troubles.
8. Both the Comté and the Morbier flow over into the plain, and one can easily question the mountain character of the entire Savoy hinterland.

ABSTRACTS

This article analyses dairy cooperatives of the French mountain region by focusing on the following steps: how they are created, how they function, and where they are located. There are three primary types of cooperatives, going back as far as the Middle Ages (in the Jura) and

through the 19th century (in Haute-Savoie) to the 20th century, mainly after 1945 (more or less everywhere, but predominantly in the Massif central). Today, there are around 250 dairy cooperatives in the mountain region, mostly in the Jura Mountains. The reason for their survival is their focus on producing quality cheeses protected by an AOC (controlled designation of origin) but also by the actions of the men who have managed this sector. The text underscores the geographical and functional diversity of the movement and examines the notion of mountain cooperatives.

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Keywords: cooperative, French mountain, milk, cheese, fruitière

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