

**Case study: La Gâtine: widening and extending markets in the agro-food industry  
(Poitou-Charentes, France) – 1998**

The area Gâtine in rural France is a land of livestock breeding and rearing, including sheep and cattle. The district of Parthenay annually processes 170,000 animals. Since 1994, a comprehensive bovine/ovine quality meat programme has been developed to improve the quality of meat production, through bovine/ovine selection, quality certification, price control, product promotion, marketing and auction. The overall aim is to improve the value chains and thus strengthen the industry, its income and employment. Two actions have been implemented to this end: the rehabilitation of abattoirs, and the establishment of an electronic platform, e-commerce services and teleworking. The electronic services target breeders, slaughterhouse staff and retailers in the meat sector, as well as other agro-food producers at the marketing level. Many of the workers are able to telework with both local and more distant employers and partners.

The project is marked by wide-ranging cooperation and partnership between a large number of actors. Since 1990, the local association for the promotion of high quality meat has been creating quality labels and given priority to developing quality meat production and promotion. This has been supported by the LEADER Local Action Group and since 1996 a full-time agent has been responsible for the project. The total cost of the quality programme for ovine and bovine meat is estimated to 1,000,000 ECU for 5 years, although it is not clear which part of this budget is specifically allocated to IT development. The financial basis of the project has been secured by European funding (38%), local and regional authorities (32%), the State (9%), with the remainder coming from various sources such as vocational training funds, etc. (20%)

Because the local communes are too small on their own for activities of this type, the meat quality programme has been supported at the inter-communal level in partnership with the professional meat sector organisation. This project is also a good example of a champion driving the project forward, in this case a local mayor.