



ALPINE MILK & DAIRY PRODUCTS

Background:

An old farmers' maxim says that the grass is always better the higher one goes, and at the top it is so good that even the farmers might like to eat it. In fact, plant growth diminishes with altitude and with it the yield, but as the intensity of sunshine increases, Alpine plants process greater amounts of energy, in turn leading to a higher protein and fat content. Animals react in a similar manner: because of the demands placed on their bodies by living in the Alps, animals are slower to fatten than during the same period spent in the valley, while milk output at higher altitudes is much lower than in the valley. It is however creamier when produced higher up: even today it will contain between 15% and 30% more fat than down in the valley. What is more, Alpine products were considered tastier and healthier because of the herbs found only up there that contain high percentages of ethereal oils.

Dairy production therefore has a long tradition in the Alpine region and was early on associated with beneficial health outcomes. It plays a key role in the protection of Alpine flora and fauna as well as in the preservation of regionally typical landscapes. It is also integral to the ecological structure and cultural identity of the Alpine region and can therefore serve as a valuable product component in Alpine health tourism.

Medical evidence:

Milk and its derivatives are useful foods throughout all life periods, in particular during childhood and adolescence, as their contents of calcium, protein, phosphorus and other micronutrients can promote skeletal, muscular and neurological development. Alpine milk and Alpine dairy products in particular seem to have a health promoting nutritional value owing to their composition. Generally, milk from grass-fed livestock is more beneficial than that of cornfed animals. Some studies also show that milk consumption might have a protective effect on the development of allergies and asthma.

Studies of medical evidence:

- Resource: exposure to farmhouse milk. Indication: childhood allergies and asthma (Lluis et al., 2014): evidence level IIa
- Resource: consumption of farmhouse milk. Indication: childhood allergies and asthma (Brick et al., 2016) evidence level IIa

Conclusion:

Studies indicate that milk consumption including that of unpasteurized milk might explain the protective effect of farming on atopy (hypersensitivity to otherwise harmless natural and artificial environmental substances). However, most studies are cross-sectional in nature and further investigation to identify specific protective agents or mechanisms is required. The consumption of unpasteurized milk is not without its hazards: it is therefore important to understand which components and mechanisms underlie both the protective effect observed and the risks so as ultimately to be able to utilize milk as a means of primary prevention. Until then the consumption of raw milk cannot be safely recommended.

Health tourism potential:

- Integration of alpine dairy products as product components in health tourism value chains.
- Farmstay holidays for families with children in the first year of their life for the prevention of allergies and asthma (needs further investigation, as most studies are cross-sectional).

