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SUSTAINABLE RURAL FUTURE

**STRENGTHENING SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN
DAIRY SYSTEMS**

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The global corporate agro-food system has increasingly marginalised food production in remote mountainous regions, where traditional dairy farming has historically utilised non-arable land for live-stock grazing. This decline has weakened local food value chains, despite the potential of mountain dairy systems to function as values-based supply chains (VBSCs) that integrate social, ecological, and ethical values into food production. This study investigates the role of social capital—bonding, bridg-ing, and linking ties—in shaping actor relationships within two mountain dairy systems in Grisons, Swit-zerland.

Using a comparative case study approach, the research examines a cooperatively organised dairy sys-tem in Val Bregaglia and an independently structured system in Val Calanca. Through qualitative meth-ods, including semi-

structured interviews and participatory observation, the study explores how social capital influences food production, distribution, and marketing in these rural contexts. Findings reveal that cooperative structures in Val Bregaglia foster both bonding and bridging connections, enabling collective governance, economic resilience, and stronger local networks. In contrast, the independent-ly organised system in Val Calanca relies heavily on bonding ties at the farm and family levels, with limited bridging and linking capital, resulting in fragmented market access and weaker collective governance.

The study highlights the importance of strengthening social capital through new collaborations and revitalised relationships, particularly by building improved bridging and linking networks. Such efforts are essential for fostering territorial innovation, enhancing resilience, and ensuring the sustainability of traditional mountain dairy systems. By embedding social capital into their structures, mountain dairy systems can support rural livelihoods, preserve cultural values, and contribute to regional development. This research highlights the importance of participatory frameworks and transparent governance in addressing systemic trust issues and power asymmetries, thereby paving the way for sustainable and community-oriented food production in remote mountain regions.

Palavras-chave: social capital; values-based supply chains (vbcs); mountain dairy systems; collective governance.