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**Hautes Alpes**

Hautes-Alpes Développement

**INFOS ECO**

## The High Alps on the way of excellence

### *The High Alps take on the challenge of the rural poles of excellence*

Late December, the Government launched a national invitation to tender for the future "rural poles of excellence", which will be selected according to the quality of their projects of development and the dynamism of their local actors, and will gather together companies, training and research organisms, and associations in the same field of activity.



The appellation of rural poles of excellence in the High Alps will give access to an important State grant in order to develop structuring projects, and also lead to recognition and national notoriety.

In 2005 the High Alps Development (HAD), the agency of economic development of the County Council, elaborated a strategy of economic development per branch, among which aerial activities and alpine aromatic and medicinal plants.

For its President Robert BLACHE: "Air activities represents one of the economic fields of the High Alps county which detains all the assets, competence, know-how and renown on a national and even European scale". He also considers that "the exploitation of alpine aromatic and medicinal plant represents an

important stake for our land, since it offers new ways of diversification to the local agriculture."

The candidature files will be presented to the Government by 1st March 2006.

#### **An excellent pole for light aviation and leisure activities**

This pole relies on the collective competence of companies, schools and universities, on high quality aerodromes or other sites of reception. The everyday synergies between these actors represent a strong vector of development in the sector.

#### **A strong capacity of innovation with leading companies**

Innovation is omnipresent in all the sectors of the aerial branch. Firstly in the conception of aircrafts, with companies such as Alpes Aero, which conceives, manufactures and markets motor gliders throughout the world, or Gyrheli, which finalizes the elaboration of a gyrocopter, a particular type of ULM (ultra-light aircraft) with extremely short takeoff and landing runs.

Innovation is also present in the conception and construction of sub-parts, due to two companies that are world leaders on their markets : Hélices Halter, which conceives and markets propellers for drones, and Welco Industries which finalizes and markets cooling and air-conditioning systems for engines integrating aeronautical devices on a worldwide scale.

Finally, innovation also concerns the maintenance activities. Hence, the company ACV Aéro Services proposes assistance in project ownership for the realization and maintenance of aircrafts. It is necessary to stress the work achieved by the company Icarus Aérotechnics, world leader in the maintenance of parachutist planes, which deposited the equivalent of a patent in the aeronautical field for the re-motorisation of these planes in 2002. Consequently, air activities in the county are supported by several leading companies in their field. The company Hélicoptère de France intervenes in public and sanitary transport by helicopter, provisioning and lifting operations. It covers numerous international events, such as Dakar or Tour de France. Furthermore, this company is a maintenance centre for Eurocopter. Alongside we find companies such as MTA, specialized in electro-mechanic sets, or Quo Vadis, a renowned actor in the world of gliders, which depict the diversity of the local activities.

### A pool of competence, assets and tools, source of innovation

To succeed in terms of innovation, one must have all the constituents of the chain of values, in order to master the stages from the initial idea to its marketing. The High Alps have considerable assets in this respect, first and foremost quality infrastructures.

Four aerodromes throughout the county : Saint Crépin, Aspres-sur-Buëch, Batie Monsaléon and Tallard, enable the actors of the field to evolve and to work all year long. Indeed, these four sites enjoy exceptional climatic and aerological conditions, which make it possible to fly about 330 days a year. Six altitude surfaces have been created around them for mountain flying, and European scale spots for hang-gliding (e.g. the Chabre Mountain).

Finally, aware of the tremendous potential, local governments have created a park of activities dedicated exclusively to the companies in the field of air activities. Today, the Gap-Tallard Aeropole welcomes several companies of international fame and has strongly contributed to the development of this field.



It is necessary to test innovations in real conditions, particularly in flight. For this purpose, several test pilots, recognized at a world level, work in the High Alps and enable the companies to perfect equipment and launch it on market more rapidly. The National Centre of Spatial Studies has chosen the High Alps for its launching site of stratospheric balloon-probes to make measures and calculations.

Finally, it is important to stress the strong presence of the associative network in the county, which completes this field. The Alpine Aero-Club, the Val de Durance Aeronautical Association, Four Valleys Aero Club in Saint Crépin, the Aeronautical Association of Aspres-sur-Buëch for the Chevalet aerodrome and AUSAT at Gap-Tallard who manages the aerodrome, animate these sites all year round and accomplish indispensable ground work.

### Private and university training centres

Several actors and companies possess the necessary qualifications and diplomas to teach their activities, and form new pilots and air sportsmen. Fl'air ULM, Veloce Parachutisme, Bartair SA rank among the confirmed participants. January 2006 heralds the birth of the company Alp' Air on the Chevalet aerodrome, which will propose a piloting school for multi-axial ULM. Hélicoptère de France also has a helicopter piloting school.

Alongside, the Gap University pole of the University of Aix Marseille II has developed a course for a professional license " Maintenance of pluritechnical systems - Aeronautical Maintenance" (Bac +3 level). The Apprentice Training Centre (CFA) proposes three diploma courses: maintenance mechanic of planes with piston engines, maintenance mechanic of planes with turbines, and a professional aeronautics diploma with an option for cell system mechanic.

### The second European parachuting centre



The Gap-Tallard platform is the second parachuting centre in Europe : more than 70 000 jumps are made every year. National teams come regularly on the site for trainings courses.

Parachuting has strongly contributed to the fame of this site, notably thanks to large-scale international events, as the World of Parachuting in 2003. The specialized magazine "Volez", notes in a recent article that " the Regional Training Centre has taken on such importance with parachutists that it has become a national centre, where main sports events are organized, and where high-level competitors train within the federal "Pole France". Its premises also host the parachuting section

of the Inter-Armies Sports School, and several independent instructors practice free-falling there, together with their pupils."

### A wide range of activities unequalled in Europe

The variety of the proposed air activities constitutes a force in this field, which is a vector of image and renown for the High Alps. Indeed, this vitality represents a strong factor of differentiation and Gap-Tallard is the only aerodrome at the European level that offers such a concentration of activities. These include the following disciplines: parapente, hang-glider, glider, parachuting, ULM, para-motor, helicopter and plane. For example, gliding represents 35 000 hours of flight a year, attracting 2000 sportsmen from all Europe.

It is thanks to all these assets that Robert BLACHE, President of High Alps Development, and Jean-Michel ARNAUD, Councillor delegated to aerodromes, intend to propose a rural pole of excellence project.

### A Pole of excellence for Alpine Aromatic and Medicinal Plants

The Alps, and more particularly the High Alps County, constitute the largest reservoir of bio-variety and biologic resources in Europe. It has always been a rich source in plant species presenting a great therapeutic interest, a precious resource for the treatment of diseases by plants.

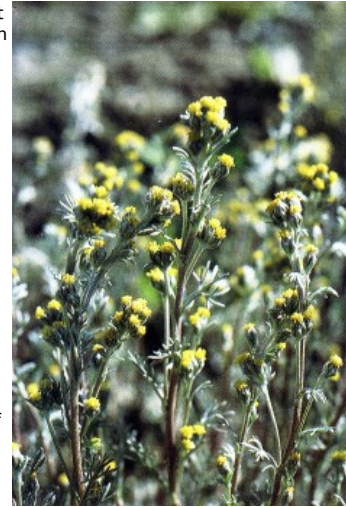
The project for a rural pole of excellence on alpine plants coincides with a strategy of sustainable and regional development and will offer the possibility to valorise several hundreds of hectares of agricultural land not exploited due to lack of economic profitability.

It aims to exploit and better valorise the local natural resources, and to satisfy the increasing demand of wild plants, notably for industry, while respecting the environment and favoring the preservation of agriculture in the mountain areas.

### **An Exceptional Plant Patrimony**

In the High Alps County you find more than half of the whole flora variety of Western Europe, thanks to its geographic situation and the confluence of the mountain and Mediterranean climates.

Hence, the National Alpine Botanical Conservatory, based in Gap, presents several collections of plants considered among the richest and the most diversified in Europe today. For example, it owns more than 1500 sorts of roses and a considerable number of alpine plants. Furthermore, the Joseph Fournier university (Grenoble I) experiments various types of altitude cultures in the Alpine Garden of Lautaret, which are the object of numerous researches and several doctoral theses. Several plants have already been valued and put in culture.



### **An Aromatic and medicinal Plant field with great potential**

In response to the increasing industrial demand, the field of plants and natural products interests numerous market segments today, with strong added value industries such as Cosmetics, Phyto-pharmaceutics, Dietetics and complementary nutritional products (neutraceuticals), Aromatherapy (essential oils), Aromas and colouring agents, Farm-produce industry (natural ingredients and anti-oxidising additives), animal Phytotherapy.

Because of a unique biotype and particular climatic conditions, the High Alps plants (such as the "argousier") offer a higher quality and contain more active principles than those in other regions. This local characteristic explains the keen interest of French and foreign industrialists in the endemic cultures of the High Alps mountain region.

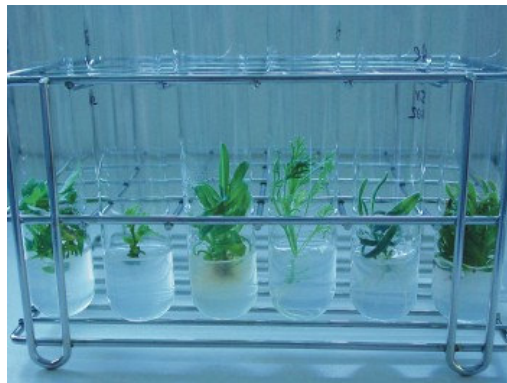
Following the development of the cultivation of lavender and lavandin, the 60s saw the emergence of certain plant cultivations : sage, thyme, savory, oregano, psylum, and also borage. Today, more than 350 hectares of agricultural lands are exploited with aromatic and medicinal plants (PAM) in the High Alps.

To protect this wealth and meet the needs in Bio plants of the transformer companies, since the 2000s there have been numerous initiatives to domesticate these wild plants of high mountains and to encourage cultivation. Until now, they could not be the object of intensive farming.

Furthermore, the Cerbiotech Laboratory in Gap has made in vitro reproduction experiments on certain alpine botanical species. Experimental works were also launched to rationalize cultures, such as "génépi" in the regional park of Queyras.

The objective today is to be able to answer the requirements of the transformer companies (extractors, formalisers) notably in terms of traceability, quality of supply and plant bio-diversity.

### **A Rural Pole of Excellence : Catalyst of Development**



The creation of an Aromatic and Medicinal Plants pole in the High Alps region will eventually permit the development of specific activities in the plant field along the whole chain :

- a) Agricultural productions and increase of the volumes of specific high mountain plants, which grow wild in the county.
- b) Development of companies already present and/or established in the county in this domain (Plantivore for wild crop, Phytosem for seeds, Pepinières Robin for reproduction).
- c) Establishment of micro-companies, units of transformation (Altiflore, Gayral for argousier, several distilleries) and/or of extraction (Acanthis), to valorise the outlets of such a field.

This field should generally strengthen the local agriculture and economy by proposing a strategic axis of economic diversification for the county.

Generator of employment, it should also serve to create new activities around a specific pole for aromatic and medicinal plants and in the High Alps region (preservation of mountain agriculture, development of a rural tourism and cultural activities related to the knowledge of the alpine aromatic and medicinal plants).

#### **Assets: a Network of Actors orientated towards Innovation**

The "High Alps Development " agency has already led several actions with the cooperation of local partners, to boost and revitalize the cultivation of wild plants, such as "argousier" or "genépi".

We can quote :

- The National Alpine Botanical Conservatory (CBNA) and The Lautaret mountain garden (University of Grenoble I), involved in the conservation and selection of productive sorts with high return.
- Cerbiotech in Gap, Bio-technology laboratory specialized in the in vitro reproduction of botanical species.
- Local nursery gardeners specialized in reproduction by cuttings.
- The Chamber of Agriculture whose role is to promote and encourage all the various initiatives in the field of agriculture.

Various contacts have been established with companies specialized in extraction, distillation, conditioning and/or the conservation of aromatic and medicinal plants. Many inquiries have been made with local producers of aromatic and medicinal plants.

At the regional level and on a national scale, HAD has listed a large number of companies (plant extractors, transformers, formalisers), and contacts have been initiated to favour the emergence of this field. Synergies of collaboration have begun with various specialized organisms and technical centres such as : ITEIPMAI (49), ONIPPAM (04), CRITT Chemicals in Marseille, COSMED (Mediterranean Cosmetics Association grouping together 300 companies), UESS (European University of Savours and Scents), as well as various specialized R&D laboratories stemming from the public or private sector.

In finality, the ambition of the High Alps county is to promote, with the cooperation of HAD, a real pole of excellence in the field of aromatic and medicinal plants, with a specific label for the cultivation of mountain plants, eventually with a biologic certification (Ecocert).

The objective of the rural pole of alpine aromatic and medicinal plants is to have an economic observatory on the development of this field, to have a centre of competence whose mission is to federate and group together the producers of local PAM, and which will also intervene in B to B actions to anticipate the market requirements and assure continuous education with the producers and the transformers.

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