

**Nominated for the Public Eye Positive Award 2008
by Gebana AG, Switzerland:**

Soglio-Produkte AG

Based in:	Castasegna, Switzerland
Industry:	Natural cosmetics
Turnover / Profit:	SFr 1.1 Mio / SFr 900 (2006)
CEO:	Martin Ermatinger
Owners:	Martin Ermatinger, Walter Hunkeler
Employees:	12 (2006)

In Brief

If you think tourism is the only industry that provides economic activity in the Swiss Alps, you should think again: the cosmetics company Soglio-Produkte AG tells another story. Founded in 1979 in Bergell valley, this small manufacturer of natural cosmetics now sells its wares throughout Switzerland. The founder of Soglio wanted all his products to be ambassadors from the mountains and, indeed, every Soglio product – from facial tonic to lip balm – contains sustainably produced raw materials from the Swiss Alps.

A company acts responsibly

More than 20 years ago Martin Ermatinger left the Swiss Mittelland and moved to the Bergell, a mountain valley in southeastern Switzerland, to start a business: a business founded on respect for the mountains that would teach its customers to respect them as well; a business adapted to the realities of a mountain valley that would create added value and jobs. In Soglio, Ermatinger who had a business degree met Walter Hunziker, a chemist by trade. The two soon found they had similar ideals and decided to join forces. And so it happened that a small factory in the mountain village of Soglio started turning out natural care products under the name Soglio-Products. In the meantime the company has moved to the Castasegna, the village next door, but the idea behind Soglio is still the same: all the company's products contain raw materials from the Swiss mountains. Some of the herbs and flowers that go into the cosmetics are grown by a couple from Soglio. Every year they plant and grow entire fields of organic calendula, comfrey, borage, and dropwort. Other plants such as St. John's wort, nettles, or chestnut leaves are gathered by hand from wild plants and trees. If the harvest is small, Soglio buys herbs from other Swiss mountain farmers or from the fair trade.

The goat butter that goes into Soglio salves comes from the valleys of Vals and Lugnez where Soglio and its butter suppliers initiated a goat project. Today, goats maintain the meadows, eating leaves and trimming the encroaching bushes and the elaborate process of refining the goat butter now takes place in the goat's backyard as well. Soglio buys the resulting butter oil from the producers for SFr 60 per kilogram. The company pays not just fair prices but hopes to create an incentive for other farmers to take up goat farming. The sheep's whey with its extraordinary skin-care qualities comes from the Engadin. For the local farm family the sale of whey, normally an agricultural side product with no economic value, represents a highly welcome source of extra income. The manufacture of Soglio natural cosmetics in Castasegna involves much manual labor. New products are constantly under development in the company's research lab.

Success

Today, Soglio offers more than 40 care products from foot creams to perfumes. They are sold to hotels, massagists, pharmacies, and can be purchased from the Soglio Internet-shop. Quite a few are also sold in eco-stores and world-stores. The company's 12 employees all live in or around Soglio. After all, added value created in the region should benefit the region. The original idea of focusing the business on the mountains and the local culture seems to be working out. Indeed, Soglio not only contributes to a healthy development in the wider Alpine region but offers living proof that is possible to run a profitable business with sustainable products in a region that is at some distance from the centers of economic activity.

Optimizing the company's potential

According to the manufacturer, every Soglio product is an ambassador for the Bergell valley in particular and for the wider Alpine region in general. Soon German customers, too, will be able learn more about the Swiss Alps through Soglio products: the little company is about to expand into the big neighbor's territory. The company-founder's ultimate campaign – promoting respect for the mountains as an environment shaped by cultural influences – is headed for a larger stage abroad.

For more information:

- www.soglio-produkte.ch
- www.cipra.ch