

PROPOSAL OF A NEW VOLUNTARY QUALITY STANDARD FOR AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS

Vlad Isarie * Arion Felix *

*University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, Department of Economic Sciences, Calea Mănăştur 3-5, 400372 Cluj-Napoca, România, e-mail: felixarion@usamvcluj.ro, vladisarie97@gmail.com

Abstract

Romania has a special culinary potential due to the important geographical position, being able to absorb the key products and best practices from each culture. Even the European legislation on the Geographical Certification of Agri-Food products has been implemented in our country for more than 10 years, the number of certificates is very small compared to other EU states. The authors propose a new voluntary certification program called Product of Local Origin. The positive effect of voluntary "Local Product" certification is to improve the value of the brand, which in turn plays a key role in increasing the number of applicants and therefore in the number of customers and economic profitability. In conjunction with the strategic development objectives supported by MADR, Cluster AgroTransilvania has created a short value chain, so that small producers come directly to the market. AgroTransilvania has also obtained funding for innovation and the development of seven laboratories that can certify products up to the DNA level, in order to guarantee to consumers that the products are valid.

Key words: Traditional Food, Geographical Indication, Voluntary Certification, Short Value Chain, Local Producers.

INTRODUCTION

A "geographical indication" (GI) may be granted for product names if they have a specific link with the place where they are manufactured. GI recognition enables consumers to have confidence and to distinguish quality products, while at the same time helping manufacturers to better promote their products.

At national level, a certificate is perceived as a procedure for proving the conformity of products with the conditions and rules established by law. The audit can only be performed by an independent organization accredited by state ministries and agencies.

It was observed that the Geographical Indications have an essential role in increasing the margins and moreover they help to develop the local economy (Török et al., 2022).

Local Food Cooperatives are well seen in the eyes of the costumers as they believe in the development of the local product and to support the local economies. Local food is precepted as a higher quality alimentation way compared to the food that has no story behind (Robitaille et al., 2022).

In the literature there are works that analyze whether there is a direct link between the certification of traditional food and sustainable development of the region, ensuring economic viability and involvement of young people in agri-food activities (Florek et al., 2021).

From the analysis of the market of Traditional Products It was also noted that the interest of Consumers for traditional products is increased because, par excellence, they are quality products. This should be an incentive for investors to invest in additional production capacity, especially in the food sector (Nicodim et al., 2020).

the Geographical Indication is a pillar that was created to protect the uniqueness of the products in correspondence with European legislation (Kipkoech et al., 2022).[10]

According to the analysis carried out by (Ilea et al., 2021), it was concluded that it is necessary to train rural residents to associate in interest groups and apply for the implementation of European legislation on product certification.

CURRENT LEGISLATION FOR VOLUNTARY CERTIFICATION SCHEMES

Voluntary national certification schemes or those run by private operators can also help consumers to be confident in the quality of the products they choose.

In addition to EU systems, there are many private and national food quality systems or logos, covering either a wide range of initiatives and operating between businesses or between businesses and consumers.

In consultation with stakeholders, the European Commission has developed good practice guidelines for the operation of such schemes.

As can be seen, because of poor legislation and a lack of predictability, from Romania's integration into the European Union until 2022, a number of 9 products were registered to receive the "Geographical Indication" certification, of which 8 PGI products and only one PDO product (Table 1). In the right column is presented the duration from the submission of the file with the intention of certification and until the completion of the certification stages, of solving the possible appeals and obtaining the certificate. For the products presented in the table, this duration was relatively long, between 1 and 4 years, to which is added the time needed to set up producer associations and prepare specifications, which makes this certification process, although it benefits the manufacturer, to be quite difficult to access, especially by individual producers.

Other voluntary certification that was elaborate by AgroTransilvania Cluster team can be find under the name of “Rețeta Consacrata”. It is a

nationally recognized as quality system which was established in the joint Order MADR / MS / ANPC no. 394/290/89/2014, where the regulations and conditions that must be realised by the operators in the food sector that produce and sell food products, obtained according to the Romanian established recipes, were written to be registered in the National Register of Consecrated Recipes. This certification highlights that the Romanian food product is manufactured in compliance with the composition and the recipe with a history of more than 30 years from the date of the order.

Table 1

GI certified products from Romania

| Nr. crt. | Name | Product category | Date of registration | Confirmation Process (Months) |
|----------|------------------------------------|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Magiun de prune Topoloveni | Class 1.6. Fruit, vegetables | 08.04.2011 | 23 |
| 2 | Salam de Sibiu | Class 1.2. Meat products | 19.02.2016 | 14 |
| 3 | Novac afumat din Țara Bârsei | Class 1.7. Fish, and products derived therefrom | 06.04.2017 | 39 |
| 4 | Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată | Class 1.7. Fish, and products derived therefrom | 03.12.2018 | 26 |
| 5 | Cârnați de Pleșcoi | Class 1.2. Meat products | 04.10.2019 | 39 |
| 6 | Telemea de Sibiu | Class 1.3. Cheeses | 16.10.2019 | 16 |
| 7 | Cașcaval de Săveni | Class 1.3. Cheeses | 22.04.2021 | 48 |
| 8 | Salată cu icre de știucă de Tulcea | Class 1.7. Fish, and products derived therefrom | 04.06.2021 | 35 |
| 1 | Telemea de Ibănești (PDO) | Class 1.3. Cheeses | 15.03.2016 | 25 |

(Adapted from eAmbrosia the EU geographical indications register)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a solution, the author proposes to create a new certification that is much more accessible to producers and much easier to perceive for consumers.

The certification will focus on short supply chain sales, aiming to create and implement a voluntary "Local Product" certification for gastronomic identity, which could be intended to represent that the goods come from a certain place in the short circuit of the surrounding area.

As there is no single definition of the term short chain, it is important to make sure that this concept is interpreted flexibly depending on the territory and context in which it is applied. In most cases, consumers use the term "local" when describing the origin of food. The certificate will refer to "know-how" and the location of production and sales and not necessarily to the type of product.

The demand for local products is clear, but exploiting this potential still requires a lot of innovation to be put into practice and to be able to be a competitor to production and distribution with a longer product stability usually associated with today's food.

For local products, there are now many case studies that illustrate how stakeholder entrepreneurs strive to create access to products, adjust legislation to support small, market-oriented local producers, disseminate knowledge, test, and certify products.

Due to differences in size, process, products, and the impossibility of using a single standard for all companies in the food industry, the authors propose a new voluntary certification program that should be developed and called Local Product.

NEW VOLUNTARY CERTIFICATION PROPOSAL “LOCAL AREA PRODUCT”

Voluntary “Local Area Product” certification of the product is based on regulatory features. The certification program shall include an audit of the Short Supply Chain, an on-site inspection and physical and / or organoleptic tests on the finished product and / or raw materials used.

Why "Local Product"?

This service is offered through AgroTransilvania Cluster, an agri-food organization with over ten years of experience in product quality control. AgroTransilvania Cluster has a network of appropriate auditing specialists and laboratories that can perform a comprehensive evaluation of different types of products and manufacturers.

How does a certified product differ from a non-certified one?

The “Local Product” logo and certificate of conformity demonstrate the validity of the certification.

What characteristics must the food meet to be certified as a Local Product?

- product characteristics: maximum percentage of ingredient in organic farming, without genetically modified organisms (GMOs), verification of sensory characteristics.

- characteristics of the production process: type of feed and sustainable production process, with minimal impact on the environment.

- delivery characteristics: minimum number of intermediaries, moderate distance between the place of production and the place of sale or consumption, fresh products (transfer time to the customer in a certain number of hours after harvest).

Culinary tradition is the most valuable attribute. Recognizing the “story” behind the product will increase consumers' buying value and cultivate long-term loyalty and relationship with the product. Consumers

want to know more about product-specific features that set them apart from similar products. Europe tops the list of attractive destinations for food lovers.

The introduction of voluntary "Local Product" certification for local food identity will create a synergistic effect locally, consumers will be more aware of the origin of the product, and the restaurant will promote quality and healthy products. There are many examples of producers who have organized in various associations to sell their products directly.

For a sustainable certification process for local products, a broad partnership of producers, local and central authorities, and support organizations are working together to create several benefits in the area. Buying local food has societal benefits, such as community involvement, reconnecting between rural and urban areas, local economic development, and a lower environmental impact, including more sustainable farming methods, transportation cost savings, and reduced carbon emissions.

In all cases, certification involves the evaluation of the quality system, the supervision of production processes and the testing of product samples, where appropriate. The samples are evaluated according to the parameters based on the characteristics of the product and the levels of risk acceptable to both the consumer and the manufacturer. The positive effect of voluntary "Local Product" certification is to improve brand value, which in turn plays a key role in increasing the number of applicants - and thus in the number of customers and economic profitability. The proposed certification scheme for "Local Product" should become a benefit for local producers and consumers. This is especially necessary in disadvantaged areas, mountainous areas, and the outermost regions, where the agricultural sector is an important part of the economy and where production costs are high.

Objectives for local producers: increase market access, market share for certified products, product, and label reputation, reduce transaction costs.

Consumer benefits: Providing reliable and reliable information on product and process attributes.

CONCLUSIONS

The legal application of the DO and the IG ensures not only accurate and complete consumer information about the products of their choice, but also increased legal protection for producers who strive to produce and market high quality products.

Thus, manufacturers who have registered established products and recipes are protected against any direct or indirect commercial use of the respective protected mark either by similar products, but which do not

comply with the specification for the protected name or by different products, but which seek to exploit the reputation of a protected name. In essence, the supervisory authorities protect designations of origin and geographical indications against any practice likely to mislead the consumer as to the true origin of the product.

Acknowledgments

Internship Project The research was supported by ERAMUS MUNDUS Master Food Identity (<http://masterfoodidentity.com/>) and by the project “AgroTransilvania Cluster - Cluster specialized in bioeconomy” (Competitiveness Operational Program Axis 1. Program co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund "Investing for your future", Section B - Competition code POC-A1-A1.1.1-B-2015 - Project type - Innovation clusters. P_35_476, co-funded by European Regional Development Fund).

REFERENCES

1. Directiva 2000/13/CE a Parlamentului European și a Consiliului referitoare la etichetarea, la prezentarea produselor alimentare (JO L 109, 6.5.2000, p. 29).
2. eAmbrosia the EU geographical indications register <https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/food-safety-and-quality/certification/quality-labels/geographical-indications-register/>
3. Florek, M.; Gazda, J. (2021) Traditional Food Products - Between Place Marketing, Economic Importance and Sustainable Development. Sustainability 2021, 13,1277. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13031277>
4. Ilea M., Harun R., Dumitras D.E., Arion F.H., Muresan I.C., Chiciudean G. O., Neima H.A., Oroian C.F., Chiciudean D.I., 2021, Analysis of the impact of rural development projects on local communities, Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development Vol. 21, Issue 3, 2021 PRINT ISSN 2284-7995, E-ISSN 2285-3952 457
5. Kipkoech B., Isarie V.I., 2022, Adoption of Protected geographical Indication (PGI) for KenyanTea, International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, Vol-7, Issue-1; Journal DOI: 10.22161/ijels
6. Nicodim L, Gheorghe G., Nistoreanu B.G, 2020 Consumer willingness to eat traditional products, New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption 2020 Conference proceeding, Messina, Italy ISSN 2457-483X ISSN-L 2457-483X
7. Regulamentul de punere în aplicare (UE) NR. 668/2014 al Comisiei din 13 iunie 2014 privind sistemele din domeniul calității produselor agricole și alimentare
8. Regulamentul (CE) nr. 510/2006 privind protecția indicațiilor geografice și a denumirilor de origine ale produselor agricole și alimentare.
9. Robitaille, É.; Paquette, M.-C.; Durette, G.; Bergeron, A.; Dubé, M.; Doyon, M.; Mercille, G.; Lemire, M.; Lo, E. 2022, Implementing a Rural Natural Experiment: A Protocol for Evaluating the Impacts of Food Coops on Food Consumption, Resident’s Health and Community Vitality. *Methods Protoc.* <https://doi.org/10.3390/mps5020033>
10. Török, Á.; Gorton, M.; Yeh, C.-H.; Czine, P.; Balogh, P. (2022) Understanding Consumers’ Preferences for Protected Geographical Indications: A Choice Experiment with Hungarian Sausage Consumers. *Foods* , 11, 997. <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods11070997>