

## POLICY OF QUALITY WITHIN THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR

Alexandru CHIRU<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Bucharest 59 Marasti, sector 1, 011464, Bucharest, Romania, Phone: +40 21 318 25 64/232, Fax: + 40 21318 28 88, E-mail: [c4alex@yahoo.com](mailto:c4alex@yahoo.com)

*Corresponding author:* [c4alex@yahoo.com](mailto:c4alex@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

*The paper wants to draw attention to the need of knowing the quality of the agricultural/agri-food products, within the sector, problems which have been construed sequentially. The policy and the components regarding the quality are approached differently, according to the vision of different economic agents and has had as result the typology of the quality policies within the structure of the agri-food sector. The CE policy in the field of the quality of the agri-food products represents a component of the community agrarian policy (PAC). It simultaneously addresses the enterprises, the public authorities and the consumers and refers to the establishment of the reference frame necessary for the improvement of the quality of the agri-food products, of the competitiveness of the European enterprises and the citizens' life.*

**Keywords:** agricultural/agri-food product, agri-food sector, field policy, pre/post harvesting stages, TQM, ISO

### INTRODUCTION

The present paperwork draws attention to the flux for achievement of the quality level along the agri-food sector. To this respect a set of assumptions of economic, psycho-sociological, informational, technical or legal nature is taking into consideration, which reflect both its strong multidisciplinary character and the strong endogenous and exogenous conditioning of quality. It has been watched the level of the quality which is created, intended and is improvable in any stage of the route idea (information) – raw material – end product and in any step of the decisional process. It clearly results the impact the quality has in the economy and, in general, in the social life, on the products produced by enterprises and also to individual level. This because in the present stage people have become aware of the advantages of quality, demand products and services which should satisfy them, their pretensions aiming forward to accomplishing the quality of life. Synthetically it may be said that the aggregate paperwork has been centered on the knowledge/identification of the level of the quality within the flux of the product within the agri-food sector but for which it is

necessary the identification, the understanding and the guidance of the system of interrelated processes of the economic agents for the achievement of the established objects which contribute to the ensuring of its effectiveness and efficiency.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

Expressed in an interpretative form in restricted meaning along the agri-food sector, regarded only as material goods, or the problem of the quality of the foods in a wide way, starting from the product to the process up to the organizational level, in the present stage it appears in a perspective favorable for the improvement of the foods quality. It must be mention that this evolution of the quality will depend on the existence of a real economic growth which allows the promotion of the concept of quality to all the levels, for the satisfaction of the end consumers. The paperwork aims forms of interpretations which start from the agricultural producer up to the consumer.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**1. The agri-food sectors and the components of the quality policy.** The sectors are

economic systems formed of the ensemble of supply and distribution circuits used by all the producers and consumers. The sector begins from the programming of the production and ends to the consumers, by observing the agri-food products under consumption (Fig. 1). The sector contains both the operations and the operators present on the “way” of the agri-food product and the instruments and the adjusting mechanisms of these operations.

*The quality of the agri-food products involves the entire sector, being considered a resultant of the activity of all the operators which act in the sector in the meaning of the quality improvement.* Each operator makes different efforts for ensuring the chain of quality, so in the sector of agri-food products, the criteria regarding the quality are different.

In such a variety there apparently exists a valid certain universal principle for developing the activities based on the *costs’ minimizing*.

The agri-food products which meet the acceptable quality rules are non-marketable and produce great losses to producers and processors. Thus to the level of the first stage of the sector – **the agricultural production** – the weak quality of the seeds and of the planting material may determine low levels of productivity or a qualitative non-conforming product. In the **post-harvesting** stage, the lack of experience for the respective agricultural product, especially a lack of experience on harvesting, may lead to great products quality losses. In the next stage, the **marketing one**, the damages produced during the harvesting, the transportation or packaging, physiological damages during the storage as well as any delays of the products in different points, could lead again to losses. It must permanently be remembered the fact that the agricultural products and foods are characterized by spoilage. The quality losses are greater by time passing by.

**The policy in the field of quality.** It is differently approached along the sector, by different operators. At the level of economic unit *the policy regarding the quality of the agri-food products* is centered on the elements of the general policy of the company. On this

ground the *sectorial* policies are elaborated, pursuant to the specific activity domains. Some of these are considered *functional* policies – the financial policy, the commercial one, for the research-development, etc., and others are considered *trans-functional* – the marketing policies, the policy in the field of costs, the policy in the field of quality.

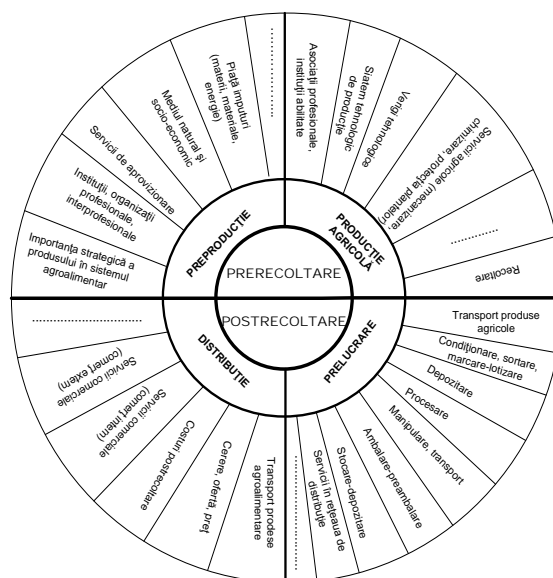


Fig.1. Dimensional structure of the agri-food sector [3].

In the international standards the quality is considered as being “the ensemble of the general orientations and scopes of an organization with respect to the quality, as they are officially expressed by the management of the organization on the highest level”. It may be represented in the TQM context (in which the quality function becomes the emergent function of the enterprise) fundament for the global attitude of approaching the problems the company confronts with.

*In this way, the concept of quality policy determines the organization to adopt such a policy, by which it defines its position which it wishes to hold on the market by quality.*

**The components of the quality policy.** *This policy (in the vision of the Professor Oakland) has as components the following [6]:*

- the establishment of an “organization” which deals with the problems of quality;
- the identification of the consumers’ needs and the perception of such needs;

-the evaluation of the ability of the organization to satisfy, economically, these needs;

-the ensuring of the compatibility of the agri-food products, obtained based on the standards of performance and efficiency;

-the focusing of the effort more on the prevention than on the detection of the defects of the agri-food products;

-the education and training for the improvement of quality;

-the reviewing of the quality management system for the purpose of supporting the progress.

**2. Typology of the quality policies in the structure of the agri-food sector.** In understanding and elaborating of a certain type of policy with respect to the quality it is necessary to be started from the Standard ISO 9000 which recommends that the enterprise should consider the following *basic principles*: [2]

-the continuing improvement of the quality of the products taking into account the requirements with respect to the quality;

-the continuing improvement of the quality of the processes, so that the needs expressed or implied of the customers and of the other partners be permanently satisfied;

-to give confidence to the own management and the other employees that the requirements regarding the quality are constantly satisfied and that the improvement of the quality is watched;

-to give confidence that *the requirements of the quality system are satisfied, the following forms of policies*:

**Policy A**, by which it reflects the importance of the business, the management methods and the application of the requirements of the quality program.

**Policy B**, which considers the improvement of the quality, the focusing of the attention on the behaviour of the consumer, the knowing of the performance of the competitors, the involvement of all the economic agents within the sector in the policy regarding the quality.

**Policy C**, by which it is aimed the satisfaction of the demands of the consumer, of defining the quality by the consumer, the prevention of

the quality defects, the influencing by all the economic agents within the sector of products quality, the improvement tendency of the quality based on the processes of continuing improvement, the request for quality goods resultant of a work consumption.

**Policy D**, which can be reproduced by sides which can be delimited by specific aspects which concern the marketing, the buyers, the control of standards and the quality verifications, the quality defects, the distribution, the education with respect to the quality, the advertising.

**Policy E**, detailed by the demands of the consumers, scopes and principles, which are focused on: *the total quality which implies the satisfaction of the demands of the consumers; the scopes* which concern the ensuring of the concordance between the products of the organization and the demands of the consumers; *the principles*, based on which the maintenance of the quality is needed.

Actual, for the agri-food products, the quality policy is considered within the sector as sense and orientation and it can be differently interpreted both for the marketing, processing and agricultural unit and by the consumer.

**The agricultural units** adopt the concept of total quality in a policy regarding the quality, by which they are interested:

-to obtain inputs of the best quality: seeds of elite category, chemical fertilizers which bring a significant growth of production, reliable machines and equipment with reduced fuel consumption, reproduction animals with ascendants with good performance, animal fodder which provide a complete daily ratio, etc.;

-to regard the development of the production process within the accepted technical terms, each operation being developed to the proper time. Any mistake which interferes in the production process has repercussions on the quality of the agricultural products, making their marketing impossible;

-to deliver the agricultural products to various destinations under the conditions set by the technical rules, with special attention paid to the products with special regime; the fresh and ultra fresh products which can suffer

major quality depreciations due to chemical, mechanical, thermal factors, etc.’

-to regard the products under consumption in order to regard the conformity grade of their quality with the demands of the consumers.

***The units which process the agricultural products*** and which adopt the concept of total quality in a policy regarding the quality and which are interested: [1]

-to obtain inputs of the best quality; fresh agricultural products, with no quality depreciations, reliable machines and equipment, etc.;

-to regard the development of the fabrication process within the accepted technical terms;

-to distribute the foodstuffs on various channels of distribution under maximum conditions of hygiene and a period of time as short as possible;

-to regard the products under consumption in order to regard the conformity grade of their quality with the demands of the consumers.

One of the most important responsibilities of the managers is to *focus the personnel toward quality and to create the proper frame for the implementation of the quality system* [6]. All these because the occurrence of a failure is associated, in the most of the cases, with the quality defects of the agricultural products. If these occur when the products hasn't yet left the premises of the enterprise, they are called internal defects. If the defects occur after the products have left the premises of the company and are on the market, they are called external defects.

***Units which market agricultural products*** and which adopt the concept of total quality in a market policy with respect to the quality are interested:

-first of all by the exchange value, namely the sale for the best price. A quality product is the one which provides the performance of the quality of the product for a reasonable and accessible price. Therefore, the customer will generally buy the product he can afford;

-the winning over the consumer, knowing that this one researches and looks for to define the quality. From this point of view, the frequency of usage, the real market price, the

confidence of the consumer in the product, the reliability of the product, etc., constitute consequences of the market phenomena generated and frequently taken into consideration by the consumer;

-to adopt any forms of balance which for the commercial economic agent is accomplished through the occurrence of a favorable interaction between the price and the quality of the agricultural products.

But the policy regarding the quality does not always allow the agricultural producer or the processing sector to raise the selling prices of its products, based on the price policy, reason for which the selling defects and a weaker fluctuation of the selling price may be provided.

***The consumer of the agricultural product*** who researches and looks for to define the quality, by the content in nutritive compound, the absence of the toxic compounds, the quality and nature of the microorganisms present in the considered products, etc. All these refer, on the one hand, to the way by which the quality fulfills its functions and on the other hand, it is examined the report between the buying price and the quality bought which is considered to be a main factor for the consumer. The minimizing of the costs is the fundamental criterion for developing business. But what is the role of the quality in the appreciation of the products by the consumer? A quality foodstuff is generally sold to the buyer to a higher level of price since it requests superior transformation and production costs.

***3. CE policy in the field of agri-food products.***

The European policy for promotion of the quality of the agri-food products represents a component of the community agricultural policy (PAC). It addresses simultaneously to the enterprises, the public authorities and the consumers and aims the establishment of a reference frame necessary for the improvement of the quality of the agri-food products, of the competitiveness of the European enterprises and of the citizens' life.

The policy of the foodstuffs safety within CE takes into consideration the whole chain of the

foodstuffs intended for the consumption by animals or humans. Based on this system there are provided all the stages of the foodstuffs production and supply, from the producing of the foodstuffs and up to their delivery to the consumers [4]. *The compulsory elements of the standards for marketing of the agricultural/foodstuffs within CE*, according to the products categories, are linked, by the identification of the respective products, to their requirements, after which it follows the classification in the categories of quality and dimensions.

***In Romania the quality of the agricultural/agri-food foodstuffs*** may be maintained by delimiting of any specific forms as: ethical means of creating of a favorable frame for ideas about quality, by education and propaganda; the amplification of the creation of any national and zonal organizations (foundations) for promotion of quality; the creation of a national quality system, coordinated from up downwards, etc. [5].

The orientations and scopes of the national policy with respect to the quality of the agri-food agricultural products have been focused on at least two directions: of increase of the competitiveness of the economic agents by the growth of the quality level of their products; the effectiveness of the legislative and institutional frame related to the protection of the consumers' rights and interests [6].

The alimentary policies in Romania regarded a series of scopes with respect to the foodstuffs market and the competitive policy, the ensuring of the alimentary safety including of the quality of the foodstuffs (starting from the control of plants health and the sanitary-veterinary controls).

The introduction of all the rules imposed by CE leads, normally, to the increase of the production costs but, at the same time, also to the maintenance of the quality to a superior constant level, the safety of the foodstuffs being therefore ensured and guaranteed.

Romania must continue to accomplish the compatibility between the policy of protection of the consumers and the community

standards. Even a part of the legislation has been harmonized with the one of the European Community, there are still necessary a series of rules which cover aspects as the credit for consumers, the distribution, the associated guaranties and the sanctions. Furthermore, Romania must improve the administrative structures which deal with the protection of the consumers.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the aspects presented it results that this scope, the quality of the products, with special reference to the agri-food products, is not only a problem of the enterprises for production and marketing but also a preoccupation of each human being, of the society and even of the humanity, becoming therefore a global (international) problem.

The products may be freely sold on the market only if exists safeness that they are of high quality. To this respect there have appeared international standards regarding the quality, issued by the International Standardization Organization (ISO). There are even more rules in this domain, which form the standards family called "ISO 9000" standards which define the domain of the quality management.

The agri-food quality has been delimited by: the policies of the quality within the agri-food sectors (as result of the involvement of all the operators acting in the sector in the meaning of improving the quality); the typology of the quality policies in the structure of the agri-food sector (regarded within the sector as sense and orientation but which can be differently interpreted for the marketing, processing, agricultural unit and by the consumer).

The orientations and the policies regarding the quality management have to be regarded under double role: technical and economic.

## REFERENCES

- [1]Cuc, Aurelia, 2003, Dicționar enciclopedic, Calitatea carcasei și a cărnii, Ed. AgroTehnica, București

[2]Constantin, M., 2007, Marketingul producției agroalimentare, Tratat, Ed. AgroTehnica, București

[3] Manole, V. Et al., 2005, Filiere agroalimentare , Ed. ASE, București

[4]Roibu Consuela et al., 2006,Sisteme de management al siguranței alimentelor, în lucrarea Dezvoltarea complexă a spațiului rural, în vol.II, Marketingul și procesarea produselor agricole, Ed. ASE, București

[5]Sîrbu Alexandrina et al., Evoluția calității alimentelor în contextul tranziției României către o economie de piață, Buletinul AGIR, Internet ([www.agir.ro/buletine/122.pdf](http://www.agir.ro/buletine/122.pdf));

[6] Cod etic pentru marketingul produselor alimentare destinate copiilor (proiect ), Codul etic pentru publicitatea adresata copiilor referitoare la produse alimentare, Consiliul Român pentru Publicitate (RAC) este depozitarul Codului etic pentru publicitatea adresata copiilor referitoare la produse alimentare, iunie 2009.