

STUDY REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL QUALITY SCHEMES FOR AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS - TRADITIONAL ROMANIAN PRODUCTS

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Abstract

Consumers are increasingly paying attention to the origin and quality of the products they consume. In the last decades there has been a significant increase in interest in agri-food products certified under quality schemes, which are often perceived as being of superior quality with unique sensory properties. Quality schemes are a way of recognizing the quality of agri-food products to enable consumers to make informed choices. In addition to product quality, producers must maintain a food safety standard through clear rules and verified by the competent institutions of the Romanian Government. The purpose of the paper is to analyse the implementation of the national schemes regarding traditional products. The data provided by Ministry of Agriculture were used to create an image on the present situation. Romania is strongly represented by products with national quality schemes, but not necessarily at the EU level. Romania certified 764 products from 2020 until 2022. In 2022 the producers were being forced to reauthorize themselves in order to maintain the right to sell the traditional product on the Romanian market because of a legislative change on the perspective on the National Register of Traditional Products. Now Romania have 732 valid certificates for traditional products in 37 counties of 42.

Key words: agri-food products, quality schemes, traditional products, Brasov county, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Demand for better food quality and consumer awareness of how it is produced and processed is growing. This leads to the emergence of public and private standards as an increasingly dominant instrument of governance in the agri-food chain, both nationally and internationally [5].

Romania is an important country in ten EU agriculture due to its large cultivated areas and production [24].

In Romania has aligned its legislation to the EU standards concerning the quality of agri-food products [3, 9].

The products that have a national recognition in Romania are: Traditional Romanian Products, Consacrated Romanian Recipes, Mountain Products. In general, these types of food are an important part of the culture, history, identity, heritage and local economy of a region or country [4] and comprise

elements specific to each country's cuisine as more emphasis is given to the concept of national identity and traditionalism [23].

Quality schemes are a way of recognizing the quality of agri-food products to enable consumers to make informed choices. All products certified under quality schemes are accompanied by specific logos attesting to the recognition of well-defined technical specifications; thus distinguishing itself on the shelf from other products in the same category. Participation in quality schemes is entirely voluntary.

The statistical data shows that in Romania there were 764 products certified as Traditional Products (between the 2020-2022) and 1319 Mountain Products (between the 2017-2022).

At national level the traditional products and products obtained from consecrated Romanian recipes are managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural

Development through the County Agriculture Directorates through registration or authorization at the Veterinary and Food Safety Directorates in each county.

Romania has made progress related to the transformation of the national food system. Regarding the classification made by the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) 2018, Romania ranks 38th with a total score of 68.9 points, out of a total number of 113 monitored countries. The Global Food Security Index monitors three strategic criteria: accessibility, availability and quality and safety [22].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this research is to analyze the traditional Romanian products in four counties in Romania.

The materials used in writing this paper consist of national and international normative acts, EU databases (e-Ambrosia - the EU geographical indications register)[8] and Romanian databases (National Register of Traditional Products for each year between the 2005-2022) [10]. The National Register of Mountain Products [11] has also been researched, with the data analysis period between 2017-2022.

The methods used the logical and sociological method and the analytical method. They had the role of performing a systematic analysis of the information from the studied sources like the archive of some national normative acts in order to elaborate the points of view and the conclusions of this paper.

This research presents the analysis of the evolution of products certified by Romanian quality schemes at the level of Romania, taking into account the period between 2005-2022.

During the research, the data were provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development through public registers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Since the 1990s, quality schemes have gained momentum, becoming important, "not only in politics, but in agriculture and the food

industry, as the focus has shifted from quantity to quality" [2].

The notion of "traditional product" was regulated for the first time in Romania in 2004 [15][21].

According to the statistical analysis regarding traditional Romanian products, there were 764 products certified (Fig. 6) but 732 products with valid certificates, the rest of it being cancelled (Table 1).

Table 1. Status of certified traditional products and mountain products from the counties of Romania

	County	Traditional products	Mountain products	Traditional products + Mountain products
1	Alba	49	44	93
2	Arad	7	1	8
3	Argeş	40	5	45
4	Bacău	4	36	40
5	Bihor	8	5	13
6	Bistriţa Năsăud	31	210	241
7	Botoşani	26	Out of area	26
8	Braşov	174	64	238
9	Brăila	0	Out of area	0
10	Bucureşti	19	Out of area	19
11	Buzău	33	11	44
12	Caraş-Severin	12	41	53
13	Călăraşi	0	Out of area	0
14	Cluj	14	78	92
15	Constanţa	1	Out of area	1
16	Covasna	23	256	279
17	Dâmboviţa	5	8	13
18	Dolj	3	Out of area	3
19	Galaţi	14	Out of area	14
20	Giurgiu	1	Out of area	1
21	Gorj	8	53	61
22	Harghita	2	73	75
23	Hunedoara	10	63	73
24	Ialomiţa	0	Out of area	0
25	Iaşi	20	Out of area	20
26	Ilfov	4	Out of area	4
27	Maramureş	57	86	143
28	Mehedinţi	3	5	8
29	Mureş	3	14	17
30	Neamţ	29	23	52
31	Olt	3	Out of area	3
32	Prahova	6	12	18
33	Sălaj	15	0	15
34	Satu Mare	28	29	57
35	Sibiu	17	41	58
36	Suceava	19	39	58
37	Teleorman	0	Out of area	0
38	Timiş	4	1	5
39	Tulcea	20	Out of area	20
40	Vâlcea	17	99	116
41	Vaslui	3	Out of area	3
42	Vrancea	0	22	22
Total products:		732	1,319	2,051

Source: Own calculation based on the data from [10, 11].

Out of the 42 counties in Romania, only 37 have certified products as traditional.

Within the National Register of Mountain Products 1,319 products were registered between the 2017-2022.

The contribution of the mountain areas to GDP was 48.7 million Euro, for which Romania came on the 8th position among other European countries [18].

Agriculture is one of the high importance branches of the economy as growing crops and raising farm animals are destined to offer raw materials to processing industry in order to achieve food products ready to cover the consumption needs of the population and to ensure food security [19].

The mountain area is delimited in 27 counties by Decision no. 506 of July 20, 2016 regarding the establishment of the institutional framework and some measures for the implementation of Delegated Regulation (EU) no. 665/2014 of the Commission of March 11, 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) no. 1.151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council regarding the conditions of use of the optional quality designation "mountain product" [5].

The mountain area contains an impressive number of localities: 948. In comparison with traditional products, which are not limited only to the mountain area, and are found in 37 counties in Romania.



Fig. 1. Mountain Product Logo

Source: [12].

Regarding the top of the 7 counties in terms of number of certified mountain products, Covasna (256) and Bistrița Năsăud (210) are on the first two places, followed by Vâlcea (99), Maramureș (86), Cluj (78), Harghita (73) and Brașov (64) (Table 1).

Regarding the traditional products, most of the certificates can be found in the counties of Brașov, Alba, Maramureș and Argeș. The counties with the fewest certified products are: Olt, Vaslui, Harghita, Constanța and Giurgiu. (Table 1).

All the counties included in the mountain area have at least one certified mountain product, but we cannot say the same about traditional products. Out of a total of 42 counties, there are 5 counties that have not certified any traditional product. These are the following: Brăila, Călărași, Ialomița, Teleorman and Vrancea.

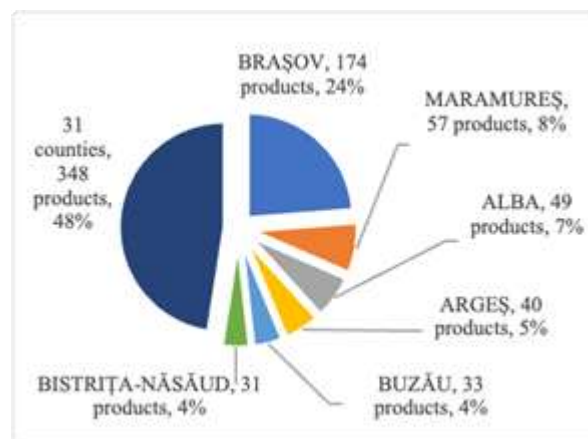


Fig. 2. Status of traditional products by county

Source: Own determination based on the data from [10, 11].

Out of a total of 732 traditional products, 52% is represented by only 6 counties (Brașov, Maramureș, Alba, Argeș, Buzău and Bistrița-Năsăud), while the remaining 48% of the products are owned by the other 36 counties (Fig. 2).

All traditional products with valid certificates can be found in the public database on the website www.madr.ro within the National Register of Traditional Products.

The counties of Maramureș, Alba, Argeș, Buzău and Bistrița-Năsăud do not have a large share, but it is considerable. These are situated among the top 6 counties with a large number of certified products (Fig. 2).

Brasov county is the most representative for the national traditional product quality scheme; it has the largest number of certified products in Romania: 174 traditional products and 64 mountain products. It is on the 1st

place for traditional products, but on the 7th place for mountain products.

Regarding the location on the map, Braşov County is located in the center of Romania. It has an area of 5,363 square kilometers, which represents 2.3% of the total area of the country (Map 1).

Braşov County is dominated by mountainous areas, so the relief is formed by four major units:

- 1.Southern Carpathians (The Făgăraş Mountains, The Bugegi Mountains, The Piatra Craiului Mountains) in the South
- 2.The Sub Carpathians (The Ciucaş Mountains) in the South-Eastern part
- 3.The Perşani Mountains in the North
- 4.The Târnavelor Plateau in the North-West part and two extended depression areas (the Braşov Depression and the Făgăraş Depression) [20].



Map 1. Map of Romania – the Braşov county on the map

Source: [25].

The next county in the ranking being Maramureş with 57 certified products (almost 3 times less than Braşov).

From the point of view of the product category, 304 meat products, 131 milk products, 114 pastry and bakery products, 113 fruit-vegetable products, 29 beverages, 28 fish products and 6 other products were certified at the national level as products from other categories.

Examples of certified traditional products: Green walnut jam as at Coana Mărioara from Argeş county, Oltenesc brisket from Mangaliţa - Ferma lu Ghirţă from Dolj

county, Pear tart from Văsuoiu from Sibiu county.

Order no. 724/2013 on the attestation of traditional products, with subsequent amendments and additions, defines the characteristics and criteria that a producer must meet in order for the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to certify a traditional agri-food product [17]. Also, for the attestation of traditional products, the manufacturer will draw up a specification along with which he will submit microbiological and physico-chemical analysis bulletins.

In the sense of Order 724/2013, the terms used are defined as follows: according to art. 2 paragraph (a): "traditional product is a food product for which local raw materials are used, does not contain food additives, presents a traditional recipe, a traditional production and/or processing method and is distinguished from other products similar belonging to the same category" [17] and according to art. 2 paragraph (b): "traditionality represents the element or set of elements by which a product is distinguished from other similar products belonging to the same category; traditionality cannot be limited to a qualitative or quantitative composition or to a production method established by a community or national regulation or by voluntary standards; however, this rule does not apply if the respective regulation or standard has been established in order to define the traditionality of a product" [17].



Fig. 3. Traditional product logo during the period between 2013-2020

Source: [13].

From 2013 to 2020, the traditional product was marketed alongside the logo regulated by Order 724/2013. It was changed in 2020 by Order 112/2020.

In order to be sold, traditional products must have the "certified traditional product" logo with the unique certificate number issued by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and must be accompanied by a photocopy of the certificate on the shelf at the place of sale (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Current traditional product logo
Source: [14].

Registration is not allowed in the case of a product whose traditionality is due to the application of a technological innovation, the production process must be traditional.

The national legislation mentions specific elements regarding the production of products certified as traditional products, such as:

- production cannot be treated at an industrial level, i.e. there are mentions regarding the

quantity produced cannot exceed "the average quantity of 150 kg/liters per day total certified traditional product and no more than 400 kg/liters per day total certified traditional products, except the production of bread and traditional bakery products - which cannot exceed the average amount of 300 kg per day total certified traditional product and no more than 800 kg per day total certified traditional products" [18];

- the raw materials used in the manufacturing process do not contain in their composition additions obtained by chemical synthesis and not only, such as: "food additives, flavors, vitamins, minerals; the origin of the raw materials" [18].

An important element regarding the attestation of a traditional product is the fact that the raw material must be local, i.e. the raw material used to obtain the traditional product and which is produced on the territory of the state where the traditional product is manufactured (in the sense of this research paper that is Romania state).

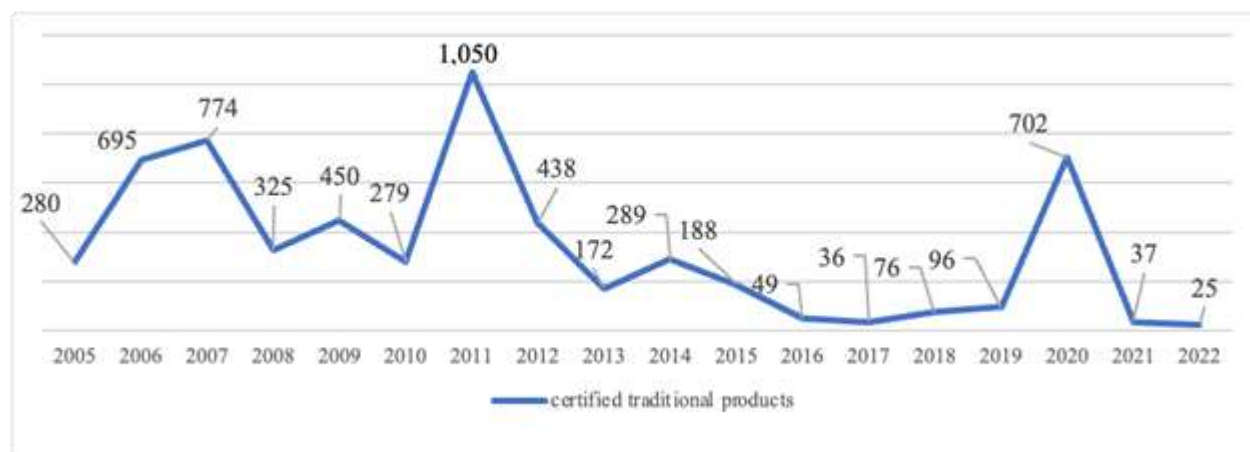


Fig. 5. The dynamics of certified traditional products between 2005-2022
Source: Own determination [10, 11].

Analyzing the data, it is observed that 2011 presents an impressive number of authorizations: 1050 of new traditional products have been authorized to be marketed. Means of certification and general conditions imposed for traditional products at the level of the European Union are provided for in EC Regulation number 509/20.03.2006 of the Council regarding guaranteed traditional

specialties from agriculture and food products [6] and in EC Regulation number 1216/18.10.2007 of the Commission [7] regarding the establishment the application rules of EC Regulation number 509/2006 of the Council. The member states adopted their own legislation in addition to the European one. Since 2013, the logic of certifying traditional products has changed starting with

the implementation of Order no. 724/2013 regarding the attestation of traditional products. It regulated the establishment of the National Register of Traditional Products managed by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. In the period between 2014-2019, 834 products were certified.

Putting things in perspective, starting with 2016 there was a massive decrease in new traditional products on the Romanian market. From 2016 to 2019, only an average of 64 traditional products per year were authorized (Fig. 5).

In the current NRTP, only 2020, 2021 and 2022 are specified as attestation years because on June 23, 2020, Order 112/2020 was published in the Official Gazette amending the provisions of Order 724/2013, specifying the following according to Article IV: Titular economic operators of traditional product certificates issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development prior to the entry into force of this order have the obligation to request their change by 31.12.2020 [16]. Economic operators being obliged by law to reauthorize their products even if they had received the certificate in

2020, being required to send the original traditional product certificate and the sanitary-veterinary and food safety authorization or registration to Ministry Of Agriculture And Rural Development.

From 2020 to 2022, 764 traditional products have been certified in Romania. From the analysis of the statistical data, the year 2020 had a very big impact on the registration of traditional products because the producers had to reauthorize themselves, even if they were previously authorized (Fig. 5). The total number of traditional products with valid certificates is 732 (because 32 of them were cancelled).

The evolution of statistical data from the period 2014-2019 does not necessarily have an impact on the calculation of the current total number of certified products.

We can mention that the year 2020 represents a new start in terms of traditional products in Romania; changing (as it was in 2013) the legislative norms, forcing economic operators to go through a reauthorization process in order to maintain Romanian traditional product certificate.



Map 2. Manufacturers from the CCFP Database
Source: [1].

Therefore, the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development noticed the need for legislative changes to stimulate producers to authorize/reauthorize, depending on their situation.

An important element that must be discussed is that through this reauthorization process, it is assumed that the cleanliness rules and food safety standards are fully respected.

All certified products on the territory of Romania can be found in the CCFP database managed by AFRI (Agency for the Financing of Rural Investments): Catalogue of Certified Food Products. It manages the list of certified products such as traditional product, mountain product, established recipe, protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, certified wines, guaranteed traditional specialty, certified ecological products.

Also, within the site, an interactive map of the producers has been implemented through which the consumer can find out specific information about the certified products of the area where they are located or the area of interest; information such as: description of the certified product, what type of recognition it has, what year it was certified, manufacturer details, contact details and exact location (Map 2).

Through the CCFP portal, economic agents can submit documents online for the certification of agri-food products as traditional products, in accordance with the provisions of Order no. 724/2013 regarding the attestation of traditional products.

CONCLUSIONS

In Romania, progress has been registered in terms of the alignment of national legislation with the norms of European legislation in the field of the quality of agri-food products.

In the current context of globalization, more and more emphasis is placed on returning to the concept of national identity, promoting more and more traditionalism.

Romania has great potential in this regard, the transfer of cultural heritage for future generations being protected by national legislation.

Consumer behavior has become more refined and the need for access to information has increased.

Traditional products must be hygienically labeled and marketed accordingly. If there is no evidence of compliance with quality measures, consumer behavior may become selective due to lack of confidence in ensuring food safety and concerns about nutritional products.

With only 10 products certified by the European Commission through quality schemes with European recognition (protected designation of origin, traditional specialty guaranteed and protected geographical indication), Romania is poorly represented internationally in the field of agri-food product quality, but it is still recognized at the level of the member states of the European Union as an important country in the EU agricultural sector.

From a national perspective, Romania has now many more products recognized under national quality schemes: 732 traditional products, 171 products obtained from consecrated Romanian recipes and 1,319 Mountain products (certified between 2017-2022).

In 2021, Romania went through a legislative change regarding the perspective on the National Register of Traditional Products when Order no. 112/904/208/2020 on the amendment and completion of the Order of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Health and the President of the National Consumer Authority. This meant that producers were obliged by law to follow a reauthorization process if they wanted to maintain their traditional Romanian product certificate.

In conclusion, Romania is well represented by traditional products, but at national, not European level: national quality schemes do not imply European recognition (while European quality schemes - such as organic farming products - are also recognized at national level, i.e. at member states of the European Union level).

Romania has a uniform representation of certified products throughout the country: 37

counties out of 42 have certified traditional products.

In the top 3 counties if we analyze the total of traditional products plus mountain products are Covasna (279), Bistrița Năsăud (241) and Brașov (238) (Table 1).

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