

QUALITY FOOD PRODUCTS REGIONAL POLICY. CASE OF AGROTRANSILVANIA CLUSTER, ROMANIA

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Abstract

Particularly traditional foodstuffs could be exploited for branding and marketing and are essential for authenticating a national or ethnic culture. It has been referred to as 'culinary nationalism' or 'gastro-nationalism' when nations assert ownership of particular foods and give them institutionalized protection. The European Union (EU) has developed quality schemes as legal mechanisms for controlling ownership and control over certain food products in the context of the globalized food market. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to identify the specific certification schemes to integrate Romanian traditional agri-food products with focus on the study case of AgroTransilvania Cluster, where under the umbrella of the Cluster were created 4 voluntary certification schemes. To measure the impacts of these voluntary certification schemes had to be into consideration the position of the state institutions, the interpretation of traditional products by different national actors, and producers' intentions. Certification schemes and Food security works hand in hand which bring us to the conclusion that certificate products are more reliable to human consumption and friendly with the environment than the conventional ones.

Key words: traditional products, voluntary certification, national regulations, cultural heritage

INTRODUCTION

Consumers are adopting more mindful eating habits in favour of sustainable, certified, and high-quality foods, according to recent medical research on the connection between dietary intake and clinical diseases which leads to a growing consumer concern about their health (Brons & Oosterveer, 2017; Smith-Spangler, 2012; Bublitz, 2013) [4, 27, 5]. Among the afore mentioned products, consumer preference is developing for organic items as well as regional and local foods. As for the former, the European Union has created a number of trademarks that are utilized as tools for food regulation. Their primary duty is to safeguard, educate, and support consumers' food decisions (Dias & Mendes, 2018) [11]. Food labelling, agriculture, and the food industry are all interconnected ideas. The balance between them is influenced by corporate and regulatory policies at the national and international levels as well as pedoclimatic





variables and the state of agricultural technology development (Glogovetan, 2022; Vilke, 2021) [16, 32]. In numerous countries, consumer preferences for nutritious, beneficial, and/or organic foods are on the rise, which is driving interest in traditional and ethnic foods that are produced locally. A "traditional" product is what? These foods can be defined simply as those that are typically cultivated or raised organically and consumed while still in that form or after only minimal preparation (drying, cooking, and natural fermentation). Food consumed and cooked by a group of people who have a similar religion, language, culture, or ancestry is referred to as "ethnic" food. Naturally, a lot of ethnic cuisine is created using traditional cuisine, and vice versa (Prakash, 2016) [23]. The shift to a "smart" food system, or more specifically the "farm to fork strategy," that began soon before the new decade is defined by the following: food is more effective, healthier, and environmentally friendly because it comes from "intelligent" farming methods

rather than traditional ones (Bu, 2019) [6]. In order to reduce food waste, EU agricultural policies are based on practical steps to develop the entire food value chain, from production and distribution to consumption (Sikora, 2021) [26]. Therefore, because they are created from raw materials developed in accordance with production methods and techniques in a precisely defined geographical area, agri-food items that have received quality system certification are regarded as perfect meals. The products in question are distinguished by unique, natural production characteristics, customs, and/or historical procedures that have developed over time and are irreplaceable (De Canio, 2021) [9].

The European Union offers a legal framework to protect typical foods, so it should come as no surprise that at the same time it supports their regional differentiation. Geographical areas are significant and contribute value in markets where food safety, quality, and reliability are increasingly in demand (Luceri, 2016) [18]. The authenticity of logos and label information become crucial when communicating the presence of desired qualities for consumers. Different quality seals come in various forms. Specific quality marks guarantee quality, safety, product origin, environmentally friendly production, etc. in contrast to generic quality marks, which represent all of a product's quality attributes. In addition to international labels, every nation has a legitimate national and/or regional quality label that is pertinent to that nation or region. The comparative advantage of disclosures is positively correlated with high-quality trademarks like geographic indications (Kos, 2018) [17]. The European Union (EU) developed quality schemes as a legislative tool to govern food ownership and control in the setting of international food markets (Vanhonacker, 2010) [31]. According to this viewpoint, products with a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) are the ideal match because the raw materials, production techniques, and technologies are all located in a specific geographic area with unmistakable natural elements.

A geographical indication is described as "...indications which identify goods originating in the territory or region of a member or from a location within its territory for a particular quality, reputation, or other characteristics. due to its geographical origin" (Pick, 2021; World Trade Organization) [22, 34]. This definition is found in Article 22 of the Trade Agreement on Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). This criterion ensures both the product's provenance and a specific level of quality. This characteristic is typically grouped with the French word *terroir* in Europe and refers to the presence of several regional variables (both environmental and human) (Cei, 2018) [8]. Geographical indications include designations such as "PGI - Geographical Indication" (for foods and alcoholic drinks) and "PDO - Protected Designation of Origin" (for foods and wine). Other quality certification programs place a stronger emphasis on conventional production techniques ("Traditional Specialty Guaranteed") or particular products made in arid or mountainous regions ("mountain products").

Table 1. PDO, PGI, GI, TSG Logos

EU Quality Schemes	Logos
PDO	
PGI	
GI	
TSG	

Source: European Commission [14].

The primary differences between PDO and IGP pertain to the quantity of raw materials utilized, which must be prevalent in at least

85% of the territory from where they come, as well as the production stages that must occur in the region under consideration. GI is typical for flavoured drinks and wines. By enabling producer organizations to mark and label the origin of their products, quality schemes offer a mechanism to safeguard the authenticity of conventional goods and prevent abuse and counterfeiting. By employing these logos (Table 1) to communicate to consumers the quality and attributes of their products, agricultural producers may assure fair competition, the protection of intellectual property rights, and an integrated internal market. They can reassure the customer that the products are authentic and not replicas or fakes by including a logo on the product packaging and charging a greater price than other foods in the same category. In Europe, many foods, drinks, and agricultural goods are certified by European quality systems (Glogovetan, 2022) [16]. Producers and their collective organizations must submit an application attesting to the connection between the product's quality traits and its geographical origin, as well as a product specification (PS) outlining the conditions that producers must meet in order to use the PDO/IGP mark, in order to register a PDO/PGI (Belletti, 2011; Marescotti, 2020) [3, 19]. As of now, the discrepancy in the number of certified products among the European Union's 28 members can be linked to the agricultural, cultural, and potential gastronomic history of each nation, but it is also a result of the financial aid schemes put in place for farmers (Stanciu, 2020) [28]. Data has been gathered to present a current situation regarding the number of agri-food items and alcoholic drinks registered in the member states of the European Union by accessing the eAmbrosia component of the EC website, more specifically the EU register of geographical indications. Statistics on the total number of agricultural foodstuffs and alcoholic beverages of guaranteed quality in each European Union nation are provided in Table 2. Data for alcoholic beverages and items with a "Registered" status up to February 14, 2023, was extracted.

The geographical distribution of approved foods and alcoholic beverages is highly focused towards southern Europe in the Mediterranean countries, as can be shown following the statistical analysis of the data gathered from eAmbrosia [13]. With a two-way tie for first place, Italy and France stand out, followed by Spain, Portugal, and Greece. The second finding is that TSG, with fewer items registered than PGI or PDO, is the principal authentication method for the majority of registered trademarks. PGI and PDO are the main authentication systems in terms of the quantity of food products registered.

Table 2. Number of agricultural products and alcoholic beverages registered until February 14, 2023

Country	Number of Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs Registered		Number of Alcoholic Beverages Registered		
			PDO/PGI	TSG	PDO/PGI
			Wine	Spirit Drinks	Beers
Austria	16	3	28	10	0
Belgium	16	0	10	10	5
Bulgaria	3	6	54	12	0
Croatia	38	0	18	6	0
Cyprus	10	0	11	2	0
Czechia	30	1	13	0	0
Denmark	8	0	5	0	0
Estonia	1	0	0	1	0
Finland	8	3	0	2	1
France	260	2	438	53	0
Germany	93	0	45	36	0
Greece	115	0	147	15	0
Hungary	31	2	38	13	0
Ireland	8	0	0	3	0
Italy	315	4	526	34	0
Latvia	4	3	0	0	0
Lithuania	8	2	0	7	0
Luxembourg	2	0	1	0	0
Malta	0	0	3	0	0
Netherlands	11	4	19	5	0
Poland	34	10	0	2	0
Portugal	143	2	40	11	0
Romania	9	1	53	9	0
Slovakia	15	3	9	1	0
Slovenia	24	4	17	4	0
Spain	203	2	143	19	0
Sweden	10	0	0	3	0
TOTAL	1399	52	1618	258	6

Source: Author's own interpretation based on eAmbrosia [13].

Finally, compared to agricultural food goods, alcoholic beverages, particularly wines, have the highest number of certifications in the European Union.

Alcoholic beverages account for a bigger number of certificates overall, including in the Mediterranean countries, as seen in the curve in Fig. 1 below. Romania is in a similar position.

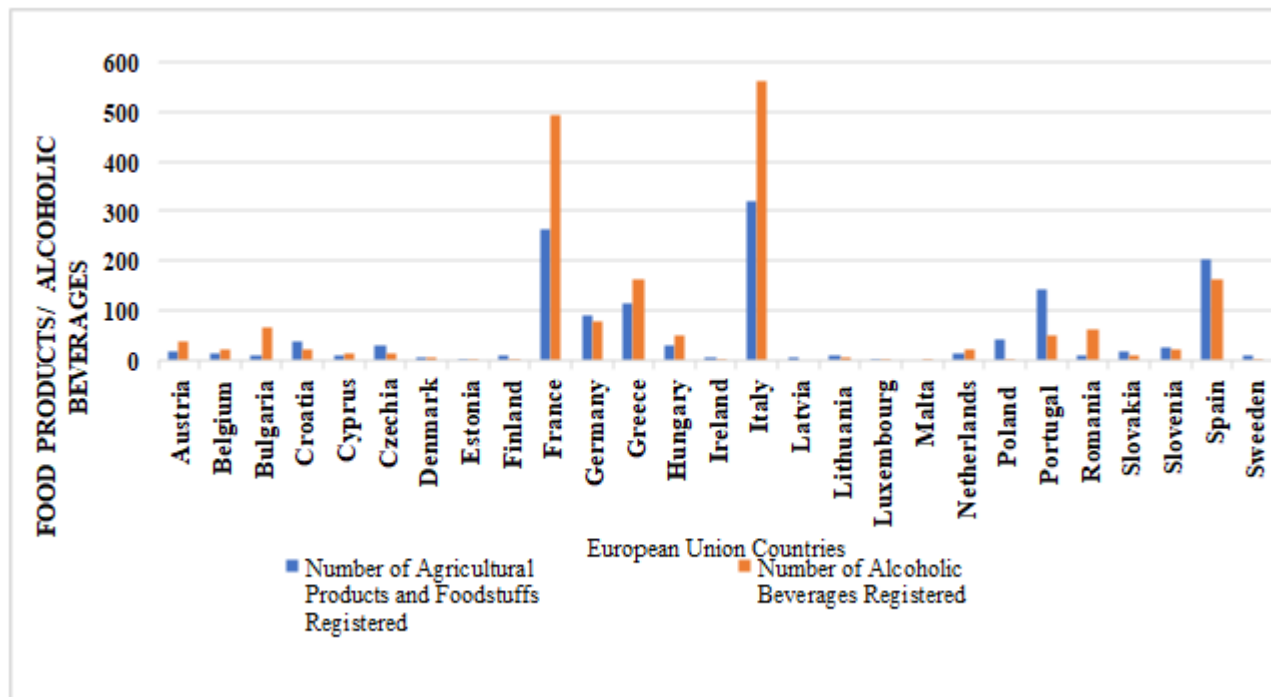



Fig. 1. The number of Agricultural Products compared to the number of Alcoholic Beverages Registered until February 14, 2023.







Source: Author's own interpretation based on eAmbrosia [13].




Romania joined the EU in 2007. Romania's agri-food products now have unfettered access to the EU single market and better access to international markets because there are no tariffs or export limitations. It also included unfettered access to the Romanian market for

rival products made by other union members (Gavrilescu, 2016) [15]. Only 10 agricultural and food items in Romania are certified at the European level, according to eAmbrosia. The following is a list of Romanian agri-food products with EU certification.

Table 3. Romanian certified Agri-food products

Food products Logo	Status	Product category	Certification Process traceability
<p>Magiunul de prune Topoloveni (PGI)</p>  <p>Producer: https://www.magiun-sonimpex.ro/ [30]</p>	Registered	Class 1.6. Fruit, vegetables and cereals fresh or processed	-Date of application: 04/03/2009 -Date of publication: 08/09/2010 in the Official Journal C 241, 08.09.2010 -Date of registration: 08/04/2011 in the Official Journal L 94, 08.04.2011
<p>Salam de Sibiu (PGI)</p>	Registered	Class 1.2. Meat products (cooked, salted, smoked,	-Date of application: 21/11/2014

 <p>Producer: https://salamuldesibiu.ro/ [25]</p>		etc.)	<p>-Date of publication: 06/10/2015 in the Official Journal C 329, 06.10.2015 -Date of registration: 19/02/2016 in the Official Journal L 44, 19.02.2016</p>
<p>Telemea de Ibănești (PDO)</p>  <p>Producer: https://mirdatod.ro/produse/[21]</p>	Registered	Class 1.3. Cheeses	<p>-Date of application: 20/11/2013 -Date of publication: 10/01/2015 in the Official Journal C 6, 10.01.2015 -Date of registration: 15/03/2016 in the Official Journal L 68, 15.03.2016</p>
<p>Novac afumat din Țara Bârsei (PGI)</p>  <p>Producer: https://www.doripesco.ro/[12]</p>	Registered	Class 1.7. Fresh fish, molluscs, and crustaceans and products derived there from	<p>-Date of application: 20/11/2013 -Date of publication: 09/12/2016 in the Official Journal C 459, 09.12.2016 -Date of registration: 06/04/2017 in the Official Journal L 92, 06.04.2017</p>
<p>Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată (PGI)</p>  <p>Producer: https://deltaica.ro/[10]</p>	Registered	Class 1.7. Fresh fish, molluscs, and crustaceans and products derived therefrom	<p>-Date of application: 26/10/2016 -Date of publication: 08/05/2018 in the Official Journal C 162, 08.05.2018 Date of registration: 03/12/2018 in the Official Journal L 307, 03.12.2018</p>
<p>Cârnați de Pleșcoi (PGI)</p>  <p>Producer: https://www.carnatiplescoi.ro/[7]</p>	Registered	Class 1.2. Meat products (cooked, salted, smoked, etc.)	<p>-Date of application: 04/07/2016 -Date of publication: 29/05/2019 in the Official Journal C 185, 29.05.2019 -Date of registration: 04/10/2019 in the Official Journal L 255, 04.10.2019</p>
<p>Telemea de Sibiu (PGI)</p>  <p>Producer: https://telemeadesibiu.eu/[29]</p>	Registered	Class 1.3. Cheeses	<p>-Date of application: 06/06/2018 -Date of publication: 17/06/2019 in the Official Journal C 203, 17.06.2019 -Date of registration: 16/10/2019 in the Official Journal L 263, 16.10.2019</p>

<p>Cașcaval de Săveni (PGI)</p>  <p>Producer: https://vlasiecompany.ro/[33]</p>	Registered	Class 1.3. Cheeses	<p>-Date of application: 27/04/2017 -Date of publication: 16/01/2020 in the Official Journal C15 16.1.2020 -Date of registration: 22/04/2021 in the Official Journal L 137, 22.4.2021</p>
<p>Salată cu icre de știucă de Tulcea (PGI)</p>  <p>Producer: https://www.ropescador.org/[24]</p>	Registered	Class 1.7. Fresh fish, molluscs, and crustaceans and products derived therefrom	<p>-Date of application: 06/07/2018 -Date of publication: 04/02/2021 in the Official Journal C 39, 4.2.2021 -Date of registration: 04/06/2021 in the Official Journal L 197, 4.6.2021</p>
<p>Salată tradițională cu icre de crap (TSG)</p>  <p>Producer: https://www.ropescador.org/[24]</p>	Registered	Class 1.7. Fresh fish, molluscs, and crustaceans and products derived therefrom	<p>-Date of application: 16/04/2019 -Date of publication: 11/06/2021 in the -Date of registration: 29/09/2021 in the Official Journal L 344, 29.9.2021</p>

Source: <https://www.madr.ro/en/food-ind/european-quality-schemes-and-geographical-indications/agricultural-and-food-products.html> [20].

This study intends to give an overview of the manner in which geographical indications are currently used in Romania and to highlight the importance of national certifications in the growth of the agri-food industry, with a focus on the certification initiatives that have been suggested by the AgroTransilvania Cluster. The methodological considerations that aided in the creation of this research are described in Section 2. The key findings are described in part 3 followed by the concluding part in which the conclusions are drawn.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

There are now voluntary certification programs in addition to the ones that were previously given. Customers can feel confident in the high standards of the products they purchase thanks to both government voluntary certification programs or those managed by private businesses. In addition to the EU programs, there are other commercial and national food quality schemes and logos

that operate between businesses or between businesses and consumers and cover a wide range of projects. Following stakeholder consultation, the European Commission developed recommendations specifying best practices for the functioning of such systems (European Commission).

AgroTransilvania Cluster developed and expanded 4 certification schemes as an alternative to the European certification frameworks. Below is a description of the AgroTransilvania Cluster, whose history in the agri-food industry and activities served as the foundation for this study.



Fig. 3. AgroTransilvania Cluster Logo
Source: [https://agrocluster.ro/\[1\]](https://agrocluster.ro/).

On February 21, 2013, Asociația Clusterul Agro-Food-Ind Napoca [1] became a legal entity. For a very long period, the idea of

creating an associative structure in this form has been around. Through sectoral meetings amongst prospective cluster members, both formally and informally, to discover shared interests and potential action plans, steady efforts have been taken towards its realization. There were 20 initial members at the time the association was founded.

To date in AgroTransilvania Cluster there are currently 81 members, as follows:

Table 4. The geographical distribution of AgroTransilvania Cluster members

County	Number of members
Alba	2
Bihor	3
Bistrita Nasaud	3
Brasov	2
Bucuresti	2
Cluj	61
Hunedoara	1
Ifov	1
Mures	2
Salaj	1
Satu Mare	2
Valcea	1

Source: Authors' own development.

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According to the AgroTransilvania Cluster statute, its members band together to promote the expansion of the agro-industrial sector. To accomplish the aim, the group members decided to develop and put into action a shared have the potential to be certified. Starting with the fact that there are only 10 agrifood products in Romania that have been granted European certification labels and taking into consideration the fact that there are multiple stages to the certification process for European certification schemes, the entire procedure approach.

The cornerstone of the association's development plan is the AgroTransilvania Cluster overarching goal and objective, which is to encourage the growth of the agro-industrial sector.

The goal of this purpose is to make the association and each individual member more competitive in both home and international markets.

The requirement to create national certification initiatives emerged from the necessity to find a solution for Romanian agri-food products that necessitates longer than applying for a national certification.



Fig. 4. AgroTransilvania Cluster certifications schemes
 Source: Author's own development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the following picture there are represented the proposals made by AgroTransilvania Cluster. In this research the focus is on these particular schemes: Pork Meat from Farms focusing on Swine Welfare and Local Product FermOras

Pork Meat from Farms focusing on Swine Welfare

Issue addressed: Animal welfare and Good Agricultural Practices



Fig. 5. Logo Pork Meat from Farms focusing on Swine Welfare

Source: AgroTransilvania Cluster [1].

Pork meat from pigs grown in welfare is a quality initiative based on the pig farming sector's use of animal welfare principles, and it allows interested parties to register/attest their fresh pork to the appropriate authority. The initiative is applicable to all producers and demands compliance to the product's mandatory technical specifications, which are independently verified by authorized government organizations. The initiative is transparent and it also guarantees complete product traceability. The voluntary labelling of fresh pork, including minced meat from pigs that have been raised in welfare, in accordance with the eligibility requirements, is permitted under the quality scheme - Pork Meat from Farms focusing on Swine Welfare also known as the *Scheme*. The producers of fresh pork, including minced pork (slaughterhouses, slaughterhouses, and mincemeat facilities), also referred to as Applicants, are the Scheme's intended beneficiaries. The scheme specifies out the requirements applicants must fulfill in order to be provided the certificate, in compliance with the technical quality requirements, and to be

permitted to use the certification emblem on the product label. In accordance with the guidelines of the Pork Meat from Farms focusing on Swine Welfare scheme, MADR oversees the inspection and conformity assessment activity for the attestation of pork. The inspection's goal is to confirm that the qualifying requirements listed in this scheme's Annexe 1 are met. The report includes the inspection's findings. Monitoring activities will be carried out by the Applicant and by its pork suppliers in accordance with the self-control plans they have established in order to ensure traceability and verify the fulfilment of certification requirements for the main processes in the production stages, related to the growth, transport, slaughtering of pigs, slicing, portioning, and chopping of fresh meat from well-raised pigs.

Local Product FermOras

Issue addressed: Environmental issues: protect the environment by reducing the carbon footprint (short supply chain)



Fig. 6. Local Product FermOras
Source: AgroTransilvania Cluster [1].

Local Product FermOras is a voluntary quality initiative that makes it possible for producers and processors to certify their products in accordance with requirements based on the regional economy and the short supply chain. The objectives of the scheme include:

- enhancing the local business climate; promoting social inclusion; protecting locally produced foods; and providing benefits to both customers and local producers/processors,
- building short supply chains that only include a few intermediaries.
- providing consumers with food which is produced using sustainable (local) methods,
- the disclosure of details about the manufacturer/processor and the food product,

particularly in regards to their superior qualities as viewed by the consumer as originating from the manufacturing procedures and particular ingredients associated to a geographic area,
 -fair profit allocation along the food supply chain,
 -enhancing marketing tactics to market regional food and agriculture products,
 -increasing local producer inclusion in the food chain, shorter supply chains, and promotion of the circular economy
 -new regional markets being developed in the framework of the circular economy,
 -in light of the European Green Pact and the "Farm to Consumer" Strategy, safeguarding the environment through lowering carbon emissions (short supply chain),

-by generating new jobs in the agriculture and food production, direct sales, and allied industries, you are assisting the regional and local economy.

Scheme specifications

- The value of the main component originating in the defined area must be greater than 50% of the finished product's sales value.
- The submitting an application economic operator needs to be headquartered in the defined area.
- The operator will use a short food supply chain for marketing the finished product, with a maximum of one intermediary serving as the final consumer (local producer or processor associations, with or without legal personality, such as cooperatives or producer groups, will not be considered intermediaries).

Designated area: The geographical area within a 100 km radius of the production unit where the product subject to certification is made.



The production unit where the product subject to attestation is manufactured.



Primary ingredient supplier



Fig. 7. Designated area representation for Local Product FermOras Certification

Source: AgroTransilvania Cluster [1].

CONCLUSIONS

Because there was no specialized market related to certified products in Romania in the early years after joining the EU, and because producers and consumers lacked sufficient information, there aren't many certifications that are recognized at the EU level in that country. When we talk about a lack of awareness, we imply that customers in Romania are still unable to link traditional methods with certification programs or labels, unlike in countries in South-West Europe where such traditions and food items are regarded as cultural heritage. The fact that applying for a certification scheme requires a number of steps and takes time is another factor that contributed to the low interest. From the perspective of research and specialized literature, our advice is to gradually increase the number of publications on these topics; the best place to start is with studies that evaluate consumers' and

producers' willingness to adopt certain certifications, as this will help raise awareness of the value of certifications from both groups. This might be viewed as a top-down strategy in which more people outside the research community should be involved. The key players in this process are the national government agencies and authorities, who must move quickly and decisively to change how Romanian manufacturers and consumers view the various European certification programs.

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