

LOCAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIELD OF FOOD SECURITY: THE IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF CERTIFICATION THROUGH NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN QUALITY SCHEMES

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ABSTRACT

Quality schemes or quality standards are a way of recognizing the quality of agri-food products that have a sensory characteristic influenced by the geographical area. Among the pro arguments of the optional certification through quality schemes of agri-food products, we mention: the awareness of the European consumer on the quality of Romanian agri-food products with tradition and opportunities to access European funds.

KEYWORDS: national and international recognition, quality schemes, agri-food products, voluntary authorization, food security.

INTRODUCTION

National and European agri-food quality schemes involve the recognition of very well-defined technical specifications for agri-food products through voluntary authorization by producers.

The quality schemes with national recognition are: Romanian traditional products, Romanian consecrated recipes and Mountain product. The quality schemes with European recognition are: Protected geographical indication, Protected designation of origin and Traditional specialty guaranteed.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The materials used in writing this paper consist of national and international normative acts, web pages, EU databases (e-Ambrosia - the EU geographical indications register) and romanian databases (National Register of Traditional Products and National Register of Romanian consecrated recipes). 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.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The benefits of registering agri-food products on national and European quality schemes are a good positioning of the Romanian economic operators in the confrontation with the other competitors in the field and removing barriers to entry in foreign markets and strengthening trade in the food industry. There is also the fact that within these quality schemes the compatibility, quality and performance of agri-food products and services are improving. The products certified as *Romanian consecrated recipes* imply a national recognition. There is a list with only 33 products approved by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, with the mention that only these can be certified as coming from a romanian consecrated recipe.

According to statistical analysis regarding *Traditional romanian products* there are 715 certified products in Romania. Most of the certificates can be found in the counties: Brașov, Alba, Maramureș and Argeș. The counties with the least certified products being: Bacău, Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, Harghita and Mehedinți.

For all the quality schemes mentioned above, the manufacturer must comply with the requirements for proof of the quality of the product (eg it is forbidden to contain additives or preservatives) and all aspects must be confirmed by test reports.

If we channel our analysis towards the international recognition of quality schemes in the field of agri-food products it is necessary to mention the implementation and certification of the following quality scheme: *Protected geographical indication, Protected designation of origin and Traditional specialty guaranteed*.

According to the EU database e-Ambrosia: „*there are 1564 food products certified as Protected geographical indication, Protected designation of origin or Traditional specialty guaranteed*” (e-Ambrosia - <https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/food-safety-and-quality/certification/quality-labels/geographical-indications-register/>). At national level, in Romania there are 9 products certified by the European Commission on these quality schemes with international recognition; very advanced being France with 258 products certified.

In order to be recognized within one of these european quality schemes, an agri-food product must carry out a procedure for creating a specification file that which regulates who is the target group applying for certification, the area where the product is produced and the characteristics of that product.

The characteristics of the agri-food product require the specific delimitation of the product particularities, but with a correlation of them with the geographical area. For example: the product feta cheese is recognized as *Protected Designation of Origin*.

This means that milk used for the production of feta cheese ”*must come exclusively from sheep and goats in the Greek regions of West Macedonia, Central Macedonia, East Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus, Thessaly, Central Greece, Peloponnese, and the department of Lesbos, which is an island in the northeastern Aegean Sea*” (Article 1 of Ministerial Order 313025/1994 in Greece).

According to World Intellectual Property Organization: ”*Even with the Protected Designation of Origin secured, Feta cheese producers in Greece continue to face challenges due to a limited number of companies in other countries. “In most cases these companies have manufacturing facilities outside of the EU,” the Embassy of Greece in Tokyo explained in an email interview with the World Intellectual Property Organization Japan Office, and that “...in countries where the origin of the product does not have to be mentioned on the label, it is difficult to know where the products originate from*” (Article Defining a Name’s Origin: The Case of Feta, World Intellectual Property Organization)

Recognized as intellectual property, geographical indications are playing an increasingly important role in trade negotiations between the European Union and other countries.

The *Protected geographical indication* emphasizes the relationship between a specific geographical region and the name of the product, if a certain quality, reputation or other characteristic can be essentially attributed to the geographical origin of the product while the product names registered as *Protected designation of origin* are those that have the strongest links to the location where they were registered.

The traditional specialty guaranteed highlights traditional aspects, such as how the product is manufactured or its composition, without linking it to a specific geographical area. The name of a product registered as TSG protects it against counterfeiting and misuse.

As part of the European Union intellectual property rights system, product names registered as *Protected geographical indication* are legally protected against imitation and misuse in the EU and in third countries where a specific protection agreement has been signed.

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CONCLUSIONS

The importance of voluntary certification of agri-food products through national and European quality schemes implies European consumer awareness on the quality of traditional Romanian agri-food products and a balanced quality/price ratio of products in this category.

There is also a significant development at local, regional and national level that consists in opportunities to access the European market and beyond and tools for identifying and promoting products with specific characteristics.

For all quality systems, the competent national authorities of each EU country shall take the necessary measures to protect the names registered in their territory. They should also prevent and stop the illegal production or marketing of products using such a name.

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