

## TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS AND ORGANIC FARMING - THE REVIVAL CHANCE OF THE ROUMANIAN VILLAGE

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### Abstract

Consumers in the European Union are increasingly interested not only in food quality but also in the origin and methods of food production. The diversity expresses the richness of Europe and all traditional and organic products that meet quality standards set by the European Union should be recognized and protected. The protection and registration of Romanian traditional products as well as the certification of organic foods will ensure a fair competition between manufacturers and product credibility in the eyes of consumers.

**Key words:** traditional products, organic farming, organic products, quality, competitiveness

Considering the wide variety of marketed products and the abundance of information provided, consumers must have clear and succinct information on the origin of the products, production methods and history, thus enabling them to make the best choice.

The European Union, through the special commission of the European Parliament answered this trend with four systems of quality and origin of food:

- Designation of Origin (PDO)
- Protected Geographical Indication (PGI);
- Traditional specialty guaranteed (TSG);
- Organic farming.

We consider the system of organic farming and traditional specialties, a tool to support the development of rural areas, to protect the cultural heritage of regions and to stimulate employment and diversification in rural areas.

Both traditional and organic farming products could support the economic, social and environmental revival of rural communities based on the strength and diversity, culture and local resources.

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The word “traditional” means using usual methods based on the history and know how of the region. Due to the natural resources, the culture, the history and other factors different from place to place, the usual methods of obtaining products differ significantly from one location to another.

It is considered a traditional product if it is made from traditional ingredients, have a traditional composition or use a means of production that reflects a traditional type of production. To be certified as a traditional product, its description must incorporate the method of production, the geographical area and the evaluation of the traditional character.

In order to prevent the disappearance of traditional products and production know how, it was concluded that a European data bank focusing on old recipes and historical methods of food production should be created.

Organic farming is a production method that takes into account traditional knowledge of farmers, responding to social and environmental concerns and providing consumers healthy, quality products that are fully integrated in the environment. Functioning like a trademark, which guarantees high quality and product origin, organic agriculture is closely linked to strict production standards, legally defined, controlled and certified, the purpose being to support confidence in such products.

Organic food processing is mechanical, physical or biological and maintains the quality of agricultural products. The packaging of these products is made of biodegradable material that does not contaminate the product or the environment. They are labeled and accompanied by a document which specifies the following: the product name, the name and address of the manufacturer and the name of the company who certificated it, as well as the production or processing methods.

As a result of the EU accession, Romania has to alling its policies with the ones of the EU. The determining factor of economic growth in a free market is to increase economic competitiveness. The recovery of the competitive advantages must be a permanent objective while taking into account European trends.

The promotion of Romanian traditional products and organic farming can bring considerable benefits to the rural economy, especially in the less developed areas, by supporting the incomes of farmers and the retention of the rural population in the respective areas.

We believe it is fair to say that Romania is a major producer of traditional food, well liked by both Romanians and foreigners.

By knowing the historical cultural roots, the production techniques, the origin of organic and traditional products, the valued added to the consumer is in our view further enhanced.

By Orders issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, rules and regulations on geographical indications and protected designations of origin protected and recognized in Romania have been approved.

The following products are covered by the above mentioned rules and regulations:

- types of milk;
- types of yogurt;
- types of cheese;
- types of salami, ham, bacon and sausages;
- bakery products;
- natural mineral water;
- alcoholic beverages distilled from fruit;
- alcoholic beverages distilled from wine (brandy).

The request for certification and registration of operators of traditional products in “The Registry for the certification of traditional products” is voluntary. As a result, operators can benefit from regulated financial support for investments in upgrading and equipping production units.

The Ministry of Agriculture has developed since 2005 a list of Romanian traditional products. On this list there is a wide range of products such as: Bobalna cheese, Bucovina smoked ham, Tarnavioara salami, Plescoi sausages, Moeciu cheese, “horinca” of Maramures and the Topoloveni jam.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the number of documented traditional products increased by 42% in 2010, from 449 the previous year to 638, and the number of traditional economic producers increased from 115 in 2009 to 255 in 2010. The largest share in these products is occupied by meat products followed by milling and bakery products.

The quality aspect is essential for the entire food chain and can bring greater competitiveness and value added to the economy of European regions. Traditional food products are often the only chance for many rural areas with few alternatives in terms of production and, it also stimulates quality product diversity.

It is clear that the competitiveness of traditional Romanian products is a function of their quality. For many of the traditional Romanian products it is precisely their quality which is an issue, in particular for the ones requiring very high standards by the European Union and other developed countries.

To improve the quality of Romanian traditional food products it is necessary to align Romanian quality standards to the quality standards of the European Union. At the same time, producers must be fully informed about about EU quality requirements, knowing that the EU has the highest quality standards in the world. Special attention should be paid to packaging so as to avoid any degradation of product quality and to increase attractiveness.

Due to the difficulties in penetrating supermarket networks by traditional food producers in Romania, open agriculture markets have been encouraged as an alternative, as outlets local and traditional products, because they provide a fair price, strengthen the link between product and territory from which it comes and encourage consumers to make a choice based on knowledge and quality.

Concerning the organic traditional markets, it is known that many European customers are increasingly favoring organic products. Worldwide, the environmental related concerns, human health and genetic engineering have created a niche market for

this type of products that grow faster than any other food.

Romania has favorable conditions to promote organic farming. Soils are fertile and productive and part of the agricultural land can be easily converted to support organic farming given that historically the chemical treatment of soil was less common practice than in certain developed countries.

Organic farming can become a source of employment of the rural population given that 45% of the population lives in rural areas and over 30% work in agriculture. Organic farming has more and more followers among the Romanian farmers, as they are stimulated by growing demand from Western markets, where organic products command a premium price.

Because our country is in compliance with EU policy supporting sustainable agriculture, a number of laws and regulations to align Romanian legislation with EU legislation were adopted.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in 2011 farmers will receive support for organic crops from EUR153 to EUR400 per hectare, depending on the type of crops cultivated. Up to that point, Romania was the only European country not subsidizing organic crops.

According to data from the ministry, there was a positive trend in this sector, as follows: total organic farming surface increased in the period 2006-2010 from 143,194 ha to 260,000 ha (that being said it still accounts for a low proportion of 6 / 2% of total agricultural production).

Although more and more farmers are turning to organic farming we are far from EU agricultural powers such as Britain, France and Spain, which allocate each year more than 500,000 ha to this niche.

Most Romanian organic food products go to export. Over 90% of these products: honey, oil, oil based products, bakery products, fruits, are sold in countries like Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK and the Nordic countries.

In general, organic products are sold abroad as raw materials; they are then processed abroad and often end up back in Romania as end products.

In order to develop organic farming and to increase the competitiveness of Romanian ecological products and thus support rural development, there should be considered a series of priorities:

- Increasingly processing internally raw material and exporting higher value added products
- The creation of sales promotion programs on the local market to support local and regional initiatives. For example, the demand for quality food products could be increased by supporting the catering supply system on the local and seasonal organic production level;
- Better implementation of existing legislation in this sector in order to strengthen the control and the monitoring of the production process of organic food, with the aim of increasing its quality;
- Ensure permanent feedback by consumer, thus helping producers to improve their products;

- Support the association of small farmers in order to expand the production and marketing of the organic products.

To conclude, the potential of rural areas could be enhanced by better supporting organic and traditional food production.

Examples:

An example might be Vrancea, where rural areas account for over 93% of the total surface of the county and the rural population accounts for over 62.1% of the total population. Acceptance of this situation led to the orientation of local producers in obtaining and promoting traditional products of this region. Aurora COM Company took advantage of this market niche, specializing in the industrial production of traditional food.

There are also other traditional products which are not fully taken advantage of. The Soveja cheese and Dumitresti brandy are such examples that remain exclusively in the traditional production of small individual producers and which are not being registered and integrated in the production, marketing and sales chain.

These traditional products can only be exported successfully if they benefit from proper promotion, with the aim to individualize them on the European market. In terms of organic farming, the farmers from this area are interested in particular in cereals, but also in other crops such as legumes, oilseeds, textile plants, vines and orchards, spontaneous flora, medicinal and aromatic plants as well as in the beekeeping sector.

The profit that they could achieve in relatively few years attracts them even if the production of organic crops is much more expensive. The one who buys these products must perceive Vrancea as a shelter of traditional life, healthy and relaxing, a place in which agriculture is based on the traditional methods.

The protection of the identity of regional food requires, in general, inter-regional cooperation with similar products and producers who have demonstrated their concern while maintaining their quality standards.

The future of agriculture during the coming century depends to a large extent on product quality. Products must be healthy and safe and they must respect the environment.

We believe that traditional products and organic farming represent an opportunity for Romania on the EU market, bringing considerable benefits to the rural economy and indirectly contributing to the development of disadvantaged rural areas.

By knowing the historical cultural roots, the production technologies, the origin of organic and traditional products, the value added to the consumer is further enhanced.

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