

LOCAL FOOD PRODUCERS ATTITUDE TOWARDS FOOD CERTIFICATION PROCESS IN THE NORTH-WEST REGION OF ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to study the process of food products certification process, given its major importance in the European Union. Therefore, a study has been conducted among food producers from North-Western region of Romania, during a local food fair which reunited local producers, using a qualitative method – the interview. Results indicate that the certification process is well-known by some of them, while for others does not mean anything or is not trustworthy. The majority of the respondents have no certification while 14% have a traditional product certification. The most important advantage of food product certification consists in the increasing consumers trust.*

Key words: *certification, producers, interview, traditional products, food quality.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, consumers are confronted more and more with a huge diversity of food products, from different countries, with particular characteristics. The choice is very difficult to be made without knowing the products and their intrinsic and extrinsic attributes. Ortega et al. (2002) consider that, given these conditions and the difficult task of distinguish between food products, the certification process becomes a must.

Albersmeier et al. (2009) sustain that certification has become increasingly relevant especially in the agribusiness sector. Hatanaka et al. (2005) believe that the certification process is the only element that could offer a proper insurance about the commodity and the production method. Caswell and Mojdzuska (1996) studied the link between quality of food products and the labels indicating the certification. The certification process contributes to a proper traceability of food and avoids issues raised by hygiene (Meuwissen et al., 2003).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to study the certification process among small producers from the North-Western region of Romania, a qualitative method has been used - the structured interview. Small producers from a Local Fair – Transylvania Fest, which gathered food producers from the North-Western region of Romania - were interviewed, between 22-24 September 2013. The fair has the objective to promote small traditional producers and encourage sustainable development by culture and gastronomy, attracting foreign tourists. The total number of participants was 100, reuniting food producers (21), traditional clothes manufactures and souvenirs manufactures. From the total number of 21 small food product producers, only 14 could answer to the interview. The instrument used was the questionnaire with twelve opened questions. The in-depth interviewing- using opened ended questions has the role of obtaining as much information as possible from the respondents. These types of questions are intended to offer freedom to the respondents which could express easily his thoughts (Began and Biklen, 2003). The team of interviewers consisted in two persons, from which one person conducted the interview and the other person, wrote the conversation. The main limits of the study are: the interview had to frame in five minutes because the respondents had to sale their products to the visitors, the interview took place within the fair, meaning noise and no proper conditions to record the conversation, the respondents were distracted by the customers.

Given the certification process main advantages, the main objectives of the article are:

- To determine the type of certifications obtained
- To identify the Romanian producers position regarding food product certification
- To determine the certification perceived advantages
- To determine the notoriety of the organisms involved in the certification process for the small producers.

RESEARCH RESULTS

From the total of 21 small food producers, 14 answered the interview. They offered a large variety of food products; some of them offered more than one type of product. Jam is the product most commonly followed by plant tea, syrups, honey and bee products, oil and Palinca (Table 1).

Table 1

Food products offered by the producers at the Fair

	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Eggs, chicken meat	1	5.88%
Plant tea	2	11.76%
Jams	4	23.53%
Syrup	2	11.76%
Honey and bee products	2	11.76%
Oil (sunflower, pumpkin)	2	11.76%
Apple juice	1	5.88%
Palinca (strong Romanian beverage)	2	11.76%
Tomato juice	1	5.88%

Regarding the types of certification obtained by the local food producers 50% of them do not have any type of certification, while the rest do have different types of certifications (Figure 1).

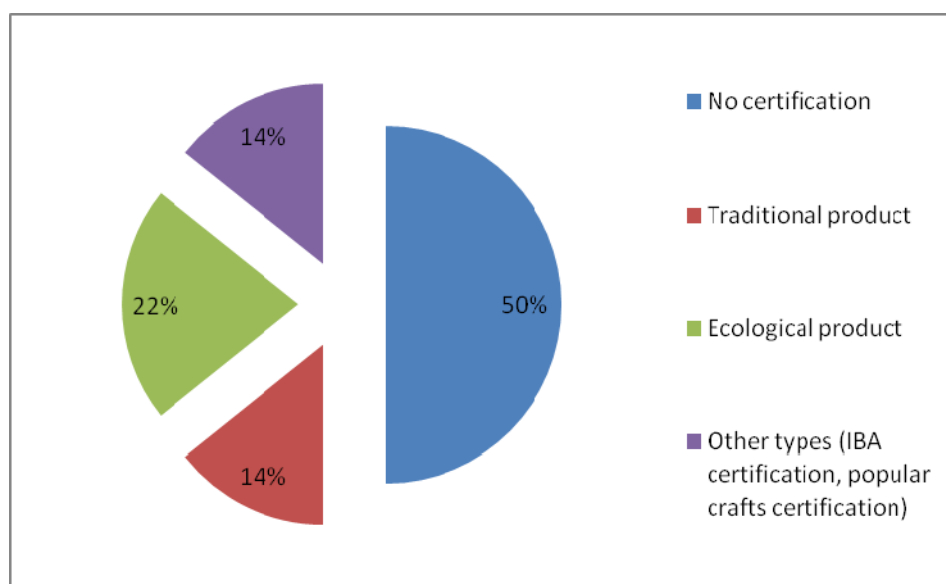


Fig 1 Type of certification obtained by the local food producers

The ecological certification is obtained by 22% of the respondents which are local food producers of eggs and chicken meat, honey and honey products and syrups, jams and tea. It is important to mention the 14% of the local producers which obtained a certification for traditional product referring to palinca plums from Zalau and tomato juice from Bargau. 14% of the respondents obtained other types of certifications like: IBA certification (Institute of Food Bio resources) for tea and popular crafts certification for honey and honey products.

Local food producers from the North-West region of Romania which participated at the local fair form Cluj-Napoca have different positions regarding the product certification. The process is perceived in a positive way by the producers which obtained a certification, but it can be noticed that is not yet completely understood. A local tea, jam and syrup producer with ecological certification considers that this certification is enough and do not want to mix with other type of certification (e.g. traditional product). An oil producer with ISO 22000 certification does not consider necessary to certify his product, just in the case of export. The non-certified producers are not willing to certify their products taking into consideration especially the taxes involved which they consider too expensive.

Absolute frequencies of the food process certification perceive advantages by the local producers indicate that the most important one consists in the increasing of consumer trust towards the product. Another perceived advantage refers to the increasing of sales. Notoriety and product protection are other perceived advantages, less mentioned (only three of them mentioned them). In two cases, the producers did not want to express their opinion referring to the subject (Figure 2).

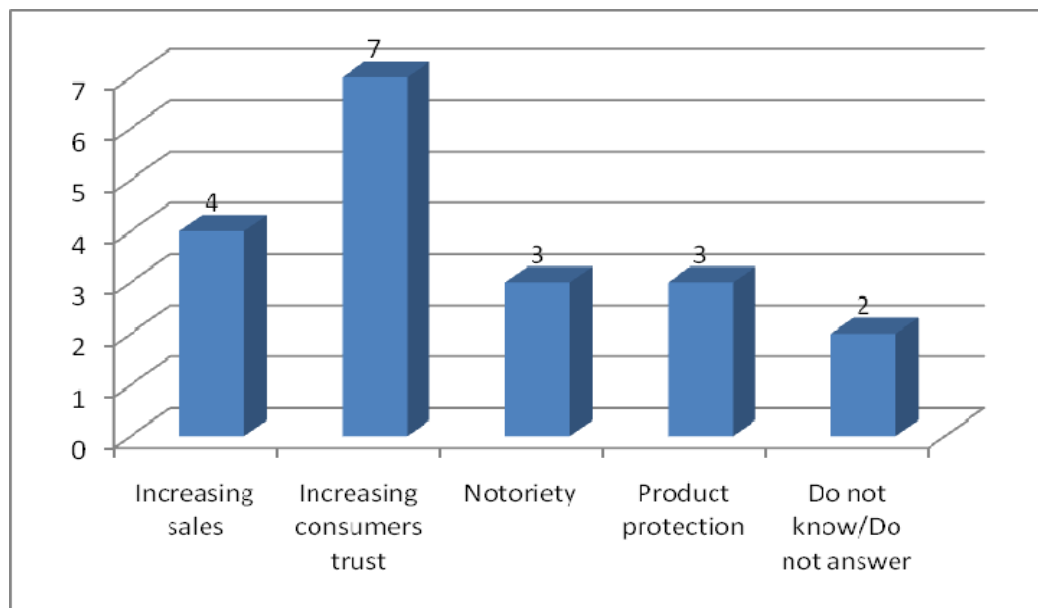


Fig. 2 Food product certification perceived advantages by the local producers

At the end of the interview, non-certified producers were asked a hypothetical question: "If you would want to certify your products, whom can you address?" The non-certified producers did not know to answer this question, which shows the low level of information among the small food producers. One producer considered that in order to certify his products has to apply to a Agricole Department and another considered that a consultancy enterprise is the most suitable to solve this problem.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that the certification process is the key element of distinguishing among food products, given their variety and multiple characteristics, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Certification is an indicator for quality and contributes to the product traceability.

In order to study the importance given to the certification process by the small local food producers from the North-West region of Romania, interviews were organised during a famous local Fair in Cluj-Napoca, which gathered representative local producers from the region mentioned.

The products offered by the producers at the fair consisted in: jams, tea, honey, oils, chicken meat, apple juice, tomato juice and palinca, from which the certification for traditional products obtained only two products: palinca plums from Zalau and tomato juice from Bargau. For half of the producers, certification is not a desirable process, by reasons related to costs, considered an unnecessary action or a long term objective. The level of knowledge about the certification process is very low, 50% from the respondents having any knowledge about the organisms to attend for a hypothetical certification.

The main perceived advantage of certification is related to trust, so the producers think that certification would increase the consumers trust in their products. The second most frequent perceived advantage is relate to sales increase.

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