

Gheorghe, Georgica; Nistoreanu, Bogdan Gabriel; Filip, Alina

Article

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TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS – VECTORS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL MARKETS

Georgică Gheorghe¹, Bogdan Gabriel Nistoreanu^{2*}, Alina Filip³

¹⁾²⁾³⁾ *Bucharest University of Economic Studies, România*

Abstract

Traditional products represent an important component of the Romanian culture, of the Romanian identity, of the national heritage. In order to succeed imposing over fakes on the market, this product's regime must be very well defined and regulated by the acting legislation. While also sanctioning those who produce the so called traditional products, for which they ask a price that is usually greater, offering – not in few cases, products which can affect the consumers' health through their contents of additives or other substances that have no connection to the traditional preparation methods.

The purpose of this paper was to review the main traditional Romanian products, by geographic area and finding the clients' interest towards buying such products. The analysis is realised from the point of view of a sustainable development of this sector and by areas of provenience. In order to observe what types of traditional products are demanded on the market a **research from secondary sources** has been made, by analysing the information provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in the period of 1 – 20 September, and also a **direct marketing research** realised in the virtual environment, which followed the investigation of the main dimension/characteristics of the consumers behaviour towards the traditional products that exist on the Romanian market.

Keywords: Traditional product, sustainable development, regional development, gastronomy, business, Moldova, Muntenia, Transilvania, Banat, Oltenia, marketing research

JEL Classification: M00, Q01, L80, C00

Introduction

“If we have to eat and drink anyways in order to live, why not make out of this a passion” (Simion 2012). Life demonstrates this thing fully and the Romanian kitchen, through its variety, is extremely generous. Another specialist of the domain Trichopoulou (2007) underlines that food influences the quality of life and health of the modern man, and obtaining food has been and will remain one of the main human occupations. The firm link

* Corresponding author, **Bogdan Gabriel Nistoreanu** - bogdannistoreanu@yahoo.co.uk

between food and health is influenced by the natural environment and the climate conditions, by the degree of economic development, by the occupations of the population. Lew (2013) identifies the moments in which the tourist/consumer meets with the food: in periods of leisure, exploration, and of experimenting new tastes.

At the European Union level, the market for traditional products registers sales of 14 million euro annually (Popa, 2011). On the Romanian level sale of these products usually takes place in fairs and markets, but very few of them are available on the shelves of large stores. But these products amount to annual sales levels of over 100 million euro, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD).

In the European Union, according to data given by the chamber of Deputies there are 844 recognised traditional products, of which: 459 products with protected designation of origin (PDO); 362 products with protected geographical indication (PGI); 20 traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG).

Means of certification, and general imposed conditions for the traditional products at the European Union level are provided in the CE Regulation number 509/20.03.2006 of the Council regarding the traditional guaranteed specialities made from agricultural and food products and in the CE Regulation number 1216/18.10.2007 of the Commission regarding the establishment of norms of application of the CE Regulation number 509/2006 of the Council. Member states have adopted their own legislation to the European one, and also to the requirements of the consumers of their own countries.

Since January 2013 the European Union comes to meet the producers and consumers with improved rules through which a product can be acknowledged as having the Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) or Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) attribute. To these attributes the indicative “mountain product” was added, for the first time in this regulation and after 2014 the indicative “produced in my farm” will be recognised (Steriu, V. et al, 2012).

In order to regulate the traditional products market, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) has elaborated together with the National Authority for the Protection of Consumers (NAPC) and the Ministry of health, the project of an order which will attest the traditional products, which may be put into practice by the end of the year 2013. This order project has entered public debate at the date of 30 July 2013 according to the internet page of the MARD. According to this order the traditional products will be marked with a national logo which will be in the exclusive property of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Figure 1).



Figure no. 1. Logo of a traditional attested product

Source: Costăchel - revista virtuală de gastronomie reală, 2013.

According to the Order number 690/2004 in order to approve the “Norm regarding the conditions and criteria for the certification of traditional products”, the traditional product is defined as “*the product which must be obtained from traditional ingredients, present a traditional composition or a way of production and /or traditional processing which uses a technological production and /or processing traditional procedure and which is clearly distinguished from other similar products belonging to the same category*”. Even more, in order to be registered as such, a product must be “*traditional as itself or represent traditionality*”.

In Romania there have been registered over 4000 traditional products, most of them from the dairy and meat sector, followed by products from the milling industry and by products from the beverage sector according to the information provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD).

The European market for food products with geographic origin is very big, in the year 2010 it reached 54 billion euro. From the total of the 54 billion agri-food products had 29%, wines 56%, the rest being represented by spirits and aromatic wines. Most of the sales are registered in the countries which produce them (60% of the total sales). 20% came from the outside of the European Union and 20% from countries belonging to the European Union (Chever et al., 2012).

1. Romanian traditional products between tale and reality

At the level of Romania agri-foodstuffs represent only 2.5% of the total sales, while the EU -27 presents a rate of 6%. Guerrero et al. (2010) underlines the fact that producing and selling traditional products may have an important economic impact in many regions and can contribute to the development of rural areas and to avoiding their depopulation.

The demand for the traditional products, is greater and greater, this demand earned the attention of many companies who have begun making market studies in order to better understand the requirements of the consumers for these products. According to the results of such a study, the main criteria that a food product must fulfil in order to be considered traditionally Romanian are: the absence of preservatives and E-s (29%), traditional recipe (27%), for it to be natural, obtained with natural ingredients (23%), to have the area in which it was initially produced mentioned (17%) (Popa, 2011). This study was made by the *Exact Cercetare și Consultanță* company, in the February/March of 2011 period, on a sample of 655 people selected from the company’s panel.

Romania has over 4000 traditional products, but just one of them reaches the tables of Swiss, British or Greeks: the Topoloveni jam. For international recognition you need investments in production technology, and – unfortunately, the Romanian farmers either are not interested, or do not have the necessary money.

Is there a Romanian specific regional cuisine in the true sense of the word?

In his paper entitled, *Ghidul Gastronomic al României – Bucătăria tradițională*, Iordan (2010) claims that the cuisine supposes a historical development in terms of content, but also in terms of dynamic. Along its evolution, the Romanian cuisine follows the stages of development of the regional human community, being influenced by economic, social, climacteric, relief factors; by the contact with other ethnicities and cultures, by the degree of civilisation, but also by the tastes and preferences of the Romanians. All these taken into

consideration, it manages to keep its tradition, taste and ingredients being transmitted from generation to generation, without ignoring the new tendencies in the domain.

Taking into account the increased interest shown for the production and commercialisation of traditional products on an European and national level, a major objective of the present work was identifying and structuring the traditional Romanian products by the regions of provenience. In order to reach this objective we used a secondary source research, implying a systematic data analysis on the National Register of Traditional Products, from the period of 2005 – 2012, available on the site of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Radu Anton Roman claimed in his book „Bucate, vinuri și obiceiuri românești“: „What are the moussaka, the ciorba (borsch), the meatloaf, ciolanul pe fasole (bone on beans), pancakes and other traditional food, other than deposits, sediments, either of the ottoman occupation, or of the French, German, fanaro – Greek influences“. Starting from these words of a famous writer, journalist and TV producer we have realised an analysis of the main regional cuisines.

The Moldavian cuisine is very diversified from the type of dishes point of view. There are dishes specific to this region for starters, soups, main courses with vegetables, main courses with meat, desserts, preserved foods, pickles and other.

The ways to prepare Moldavian food are many, from baking or pickling to using salt, smoking, frying or smothering. Food prepared in this way are usually very tasty, but not necessary dietary.

The main products, registered in the Traditional products attestation register in the area of Moldova are presented in Table 1.

Table no. 1. Traditional products - Moldova

Bread and bakery products	Dairy products	Meat products
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branzoaice (Cheesecake) "Poale-n brâu" – Botești, county of Neamț • Cozonac de casă (homemade sponge cake) – Botești, county of Neamț • Pâinea bunicii (Grandma’s bread) - Botești, county of Neamț 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheese – Grumăzești, county of Neamț • Cow cheese - Șipote county of Iași • Cheddar – smoked appetizer – Flamânz, county of Botoșani • Smoked cheddar – Vorona, jud. Botoșani, Grumăzești, Urecheni county of Neamț • Skimmed milk - Șipote, county of Iași • Urda (cheese) – Miroslăvești, county of Iași 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sausages - Botoșani • Mutton sausages - Botoșani • Chișcă (pudding with meat) - Botoșani • Smoked cutlet - Botoșani • Peasant pastrami - Botoșani • Salami - Botoșani • Toba (pudding with meat) - Botoșani

Source: the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2006

A large range of beverages are served in the Romanian cuisine they can be differentiated by the ingredients they are made of, by the technologies, age and season. Such a beverage is braga – low alcoholic drink. A high alcoholic drink is the brandy or sugar beet basamac.

Wine production and consumption is an integral part of this region culture. Cotnari wine is a brand specific to this area.

Dobrogea cuisine is highly influenced by the area climate, landform and fauna.

In a hilly, mountainous, plain area but also with access to rivers and sea, fish dishes, wild game or mutton dishes are very usual, but also chicken meat, beef or pork, vegetables, fruits, dairy products and eggs. Dobrogea food displays the abundance of ingredients this area has.

Dobrogea dishes are light, nourishing and tasty while simple to prepare. They are based especially on mutton, game and fish. One specific dish is Dobrogean pie made with sheep cheese and served with yoghurt.

The main products, registered in the Traditional products attestation register in the area of Dobrogea are presented in Table 2.

Table no. 2. Traditional Products - Dobrogea

Dairy products
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salted cheese - Cătalina, Silistraru, Vlădeni, county of Tulcea • Sheep salted cheese – Băneasa, county of Constanța • Cow salted cheese - Adamclisi, Băneasa, Negru Vodă, county of Constanța

Source: the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2008/2009

Muntenia traditional cuisine is characterised by tasty food. Borsch is made with chicken and beef but also with vegetables, in order to make them sour borsch is used, lovage is used a lot and this gives a specific taste. Borsch, especially vegetable ones, are improved with rice, but also with “rags” made out of egg and flour.

Dishes are made out of meat and vegetables or only fresh or preserved vegetables, like: stew, moussaka, chicken stew, fish cooked in an oven or baked with different garnishes, forcemeat rolls in cabbage leaves with polenta, lamb stew (the National office of traditional and ecological Romanian products, 2010).

Cuisine in Muntenia has suffered along the times Greek, oriental, French and Italian influences.

The main products, registered in the Traditional products attestation register in the area of Muntenia are presented in Table 3.

Banat cuisine is one of the most savoury of the whole country. It is a mix of Austro – Hungarian, Greek, Italian and French cuisine. The people of Banat are taught to eat well at every meal of the day. There is no lunch without ciorba (Borsch). Rags soup is a Banat favourite. Among the most well-known food you can find: zacusca, veal borsch, beet borsch, old forcemeat rolls in cabbage leaves, stuffed onion and puddings.

Food prepared in Banat are made with pork, especially with fried vegetables and smothered in lard or oil, with flour sauces, spices like pepper, thyme, paprika and caraway.

Table no. 3. Traditional products - Muntenia

Bread and bakery products	Dairy products	Meat products
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buzau pretzels - Buzău • Homemade traditional sponge cake - Buzău • Traditional braids -Buzău • Pita - Buzău • Black bread - Brăila • Country bread - Vernești county of Buzău 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White cheese - Săpunari - Călărași • Fresh cow cheese -Bradu, Cosești, Arges • Smoked cheese - Campulung, Dambovicioara, Rucăr, Stoienesti, Valea Mare -Parvat county of Arges, Buzau • Milk covașit- Campulung, Valea Mare-Pravat county of Arges • Urda (cheese)-Corbi, Curtea de Arges county of Arges • Sheep urda (cheese) – Cosești - Arges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Babc - Pleșcoi- Buzău • Smoked sausages - Pleșcoi • Fresh sausages- Domnești county of Argeș • Country sausages -Bascov county of Argeș • Dry sausages-Pleșcoi-Buzău • Sheep pastrami -Bâscov, Cetățeni, Dâmboviciara, Domnești county of Argeș • Smoked fat - Bâscov-Argeș • Traditional homemade tobă (pudding with meat) - Bâscov-Argeș

Source: Sterian, 2013, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2011.

Banat cuisine is characterised by tasty, fat and nourishing food.

The main products, registered in the Traditional products attestation register in the area of Banat are presented in Table 4.

Table no. 4. Traditional products - Banat

Meat products	Dairy products	Bread and bakery products
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoked house made Caltaboș (sausage) – Bocșa county of Caraș -Severin • Homemade sausages –Bocșa county of Caraș - Severin • Smoked bacon - Bocșa county of Caraș-Severin • Jumări (greaves)-Bocșa county of Caraș-Severin • Smoked Sângeretele (pork meat sausage) - Bocșa county of Caraș-Severin • Smoked fat - Bocșa county of Caraș-Severin • Housemade smoked bacon - Bocșa county of Caraș -Severin • Homemade tobă (pudding with meat) - Bocșa county of Caraș - Severin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salted cheese - Vermes, county of Caraș - Severin • Cream -Vermes county of Caraș - Severin • Butter-Vermes county of Caraș - Severin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banat bread -Bocșa county of Caraș-Severin

Source: the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2005/2006

Ardeal Cuisine was as history has it, one of the great wins of the culinary art. One of the most important culinary critics of the last half of the century from Great Britain, Egon Ronay, Hungarian by origin, used to write in his editorials in the Daily Telegraph that cuisine has given the world three complex culinary concepts: French cuisine; Chinese cuisine; Transilvanian cuisine.

The Transilvanian heritage contains: flour and paprika sauces; using herbal spices (like dill, parsley, tarragon, marjoram, basil); soups in which fruits and smoked meat mix.

In the centre of Transilvania, local gastronomy is characterised by Ardeal and Hungarian food.

The main products, registered in the Traditional products attestation register in the area of Transilvania are presented in Table 5.

Table no. 5. Traditional products - Transilvania

Bread and bakery products	Dairy products	Meat products
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grandmas' sponge cake - Baia Mare • Maramures braids -Baia Mare • Homemade Oloi - Miresul Mare • Homemade bread - Baia Mare, Ocna Şugatag, Desesti • Country corn bread - Targu Lăpuş • Pasca- Baia Mare • Homemade Pita - Miresul Mare • Rastaute - Baia Mare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brânză de burduf (bellows cheese) - Cerneşti, Şighetul Marmaţiei • Smoked Brânză de burduf (bellows cheese) - Târgul Lăpus • Salted cheese - Cerneşti, Larga, Ocna Şugatag, Şighetul Marmaţiei, Tisa, Marginimea Sibiului, Sibiu • Cheddar - Barsana, Cerneşti, Larga, Şighetul Marmaţiei, Târgul Lăpuş, Tisa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoked fat Cugir area • Smoked pork muscle Vlădeni area, • Smoked sausages made from mutton and veal - Vlădeni area

Source: the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2012

Oltenian Cuisine represents a distinctive aspect in the life of the people, forming a real cult linked to food and means of preparation. The most distinctive symbol of Oltenia was and will be the leek. People in oltenia eat lots of borsch, often they consume leek, chicken or vegetable borsch, which they prefer a little sour (RomanianMonastarys.org, 2013).

The main products, registered in the Traditional products attestation register in the area of Oltenia are presented in Table 6.

The best represented region, if we look at the number of registered products is Transilvania. In this region people have been more receptive to the advantages that products registration as traditional products has to offer

Table no. 6. Traditional products - Oltenia

Bread and bakery products	Dairy products	Meat products
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colaci (large pretzels) – Drobeta Turnu Severin county of Mehedinți • Oltenesti colaci and prescuri - Băilești county of Olt • Bread on the hearth – Băilești - Olt • Homemade bread – Drobeta Turnu Severin county of Mehedinți • Country Turtite (small bread) on the hearth - Băilești Olt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fermented cheese -Telești county of Gorj • Cheddar - Drobeta Turnu Severin county of Mehedinți • Olt cheddar with leek - Breasta county of Dolj • Cow milk salted cheese – Drobeta Turnu Severin • Olt salted cheese with dill and pepper - Breasta county of Dolj • Olt salted cheese with leek - Breasca county of Dolj 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caltaboși (sausages) - Craiova county of Dolj • Olt sausages - Craiova • Rose sausages - Craiova • Drob -Craiova • Specialties: Bucăți la garnița (meat kept with lard)- Craiova • Tobă (pudding with meat)- Craiova

Source: the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2006

The region which was least receptive to the traditional product registration was Dobrogea (Table 7).

Table no. 7. Number of traditional products divided by most important categories and geographic areas

Product class Regions	Dairy	Meat products	Bakery	Vegetables – fruits, preserves	Alcoholic beverages
Moldova	95	188	18	14	-
Dobrogea	8	-	3	-	-
Muntenia	482	89	36	2	62
Banat	14	32	36	1	2
Transilvania	344	232	328	10	160

Source: Analysis on the National office of traditional and ecological Romanian products, 2010.

Romanian traditional products have a large potential to sell on the external markets, where people appreciate the tradition that is used to develop these foods. They represent a viable counter offer to the similar products from other countries.

2. Research methodology

The purpose of the direct marketing research has followed the investigation of the main dimensions / characteristics of the consumer behaviour towards the traditional products existing on the Romanian market, in order to build a complete picture of the local

consumption requirements, and also in order to identify the potential for development of the offer for Romanian traditional products. The utility of the research theme is confirmed by the reduced number of existing studies in Romania with regards to the problems raised by traditional products, by the lack of a common opinion regarding the content of the term, among consumers and also among providers and last but not least by the tendency of development of the European consumers demand for traditional products from the region.

In this context, the objectives of the present research refer mainly to:

- understanding the measure in which Romanian consumers are familiarised with the notion of traditional product and the interest for the present offer;
- determining the consumers availability to buy and consume Romanian traditional products;
- identifying the degree of entry in consumption of the most important categories of traditional products.

The method applied has been quantitative, having the characteristics of a pilot inquiry. The collective on which the research was made contained people over 18 years old, both male and female, coming from various regions of the country (Table 8).

Table no. 8. Demographic details

Characteristics		Number	%
<i>Sex</i>	Female	315	44.7
	Male	389	55.3
<i>Age</i>	18-24	310	44.60
	25-34	176	25
	35-44	108	15.3
	45-44	79	11.2
	>55	31	4.4
<i>Studies</i>	Professional school	25	3.6
	High school	199	28.3
	University studies	480	68.2
<i>Area of provenience</i>	Banat	19	2.7
	Oltenia	70	9.9
	Muntenia	405	57.5
	Dobrogea	47	6.7
	Moldova	125	17.8
	Ardeal	38	5.4

Source: realised by authors based on research

The observation unit, and the inquiry unit are represented by the individual. The study was realised by applying the self-administered inquiry method, using the technique of the on line interview, in order to make possible the investigation of respondents from all the regions of the country, with reduced costs.

The instrument used for gathering the information was a structured questionnaire, based on closed questions, in order for the data to be easy to fill in and easy to centralize. In essence we tried to identify the type of traditional products with success potential among Romanian

consumers. The questionnaire was applied in the month of May 2013, being distributed through e-mail and the social network Facebook.

The final sample contained 704 respondents, and its structure is shown in graphical form in Table 8. Following the processing, the data were analysed, this supposed using statistical and mathematical techniques in order to characterise the variation and the spread of the variables, by presenting the distribution according to frequency.

3. Results and debates

One of the research objectives was the understanding of the degree in which Romanian consumers are familiar with the notion of traditional product and the concern expressed in relation to the related offer. According to research results, about 40% of the respondents inform themselves about traditional products out of curiosity, while ~ 32% of the respondents are interested in these products not out of mere curiosity, but also because they desire to consume them (Figure 2).

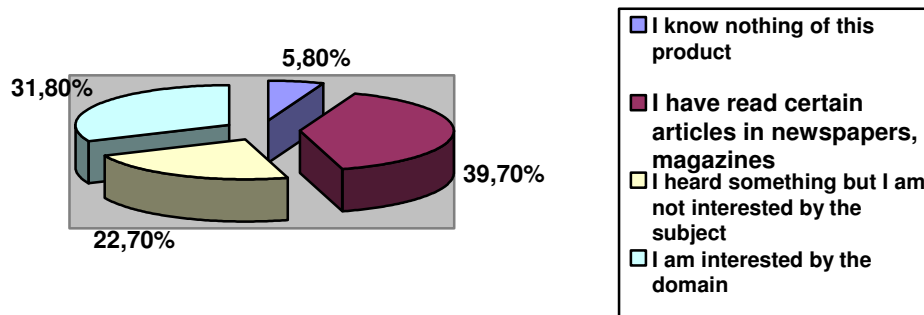


Figure no. 2. Degree of concern for traditional products

Source: realised by authors based on research

From a management point of view, this result indicates the possibility of promoting traditional products through newspapers, magazines, the Internet. In terms of product policy, organisations are recommended to promote their traditional products through these media channels, obtaining thus, new competitive advantages.

A second targeted objective was to analyze how determined are consumers to buy, respectively consume Romanian traditional products. In this respect, information derived from the research show that 75% of the respondents would buy and consume traditional products, 19.5% are not decided, while the rest of 5.8% declare that they do not wish to buy or consume these products (Figure 3).

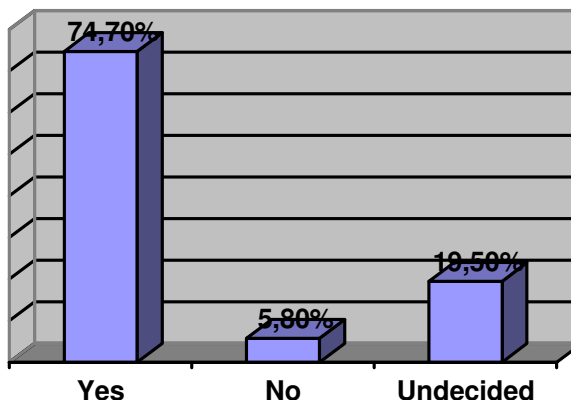


Figure no. 3. Attractiveness of traditional products

Source: realised by authors based on research

From a management point of view, this result indicates a potential of growth of the market in future years, due to increasing demand for these products. In terms of product policy, organisations that choose to diversify their assortment of traditional products have the possibility to harness this opportunity, obtaining new competitive advantages.

A third objective regarded identifying the degree of penetration in consumption, of the most important types of traditional products. According to results, 24% of the respondents would buy bread and bakery products, 23.5% would buy meat products, 21.8% would buy dairy products and 17.1% would buy fruits and vegetables products (Table 9).

Table no. 9. Traditional products most likely to be purchased

Bread and bakery products	24%
Meat products	23.5%
Dairy products	21.8%
Vegetable and fruits products	17.1%
Fish products	8.4%
Do not consume	4.1%
Other products	1.2%

Source: realised by authors based on research

This result indicates the existence of a growth potential for businesses with objectives in bakery products production, meat and dairy products, fruits and vegetables products, all according to traditional recipes. The providers who decide to diversify their product assortment will have the opportunity to obtain new competitive advantages (this already is happening in big supermarkets where there have been arranged specific stands only for traditional products).

Conclusions

Consumers desire to purchase traditional products, Trichopoulou, et al (2006) accentuates that they are sometimes deceived by some merchants that use on the labels the “traditional product” designation, thus inducing loss of confidence in traditional products.

Luis Guerrero et al (2009) and Zuzanna Pieniak et al (2009) underline that improvements are necessary in what concerns the security and health of traditional products, in order to increase the market share for these products.

Romania has just one product with UE recognition that is “Magiunul de Topoloveni”. Very little compared to the 4000 products registered at national level, which makes the concept of “traditional product” lose its notoriety.

This sector generates high revenues, which most of the time end up in the pockets of “whom it should not”, imposing a need for urgent change in current legislation regarding this field. Traditional products producers are faced with the option of closing down their small businesses, when confronted with unfair competition.

On European Union level, this field regulation is implemented with a professional approach, thus on EU level, being registered around 1000 traditional products. (European Commission, 2013). The system imposed in EU protects and promotes commercial brands of agricultural products and traditional European foods. The work of thousands of farmers and food producers is thus harnessed, concurring to the development and conservation of EU rural patrimony. Also, the system guarantees to consumers that they can trust the food products which carry this label.

The region of Romania which has profited from the traditional products is Transilvania, fact underlined by the very large number of registered products, but also through the many profile associations like Asociația Producătorilor de Produse Tradiționale și Ecologice din Maramureș (The Association of Traditional and Ecological Products Producers of Maramureș), Asociația Producătorilor de Produse Tradiționale și Ecologice (The Association of Traditional and Ecological Products) "Alba Transilvania", Asociația Producătorilor de Produse Tradiționale și Ecologice Satu Mare (The Association of Traditional and Ecological Products Producers Satu Mare).

Stores for traditional products begin to open in very many areas, especially in large cities where there is a good enough demand for traditional products. Surely the market is not saturated with quality traditional products – with counterfeit products, unfortunately yes – so opening a business in the domain is opportune in the present moment.

Through promoting traditional products in newspapers, magazines, on the internet we can insure a much more complete information spread to the consumers who have the possibility to learn from read articles, how to recognise a traditional product from a fake one among others.

The fight between traditional and new will be one of length, the traditional gaining more and more terrain and Romania should profit from this growing trend.

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