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# NEW DIMENSIONS OF FOOD SECURITY IN ROMANIA FROM THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract:

*Article outlines the key coordinates of food security at global, regional and national level, highlighting and analyzing requirements, transformations, limits and opportunities facing our country at this level, in the context of EU integration.*

**Key words:** *food security, sustainable development, social responsibility*

## INTRODUCTION

Despite efforts at global, regional or national level, the economic development and food security issues are in a permanent increase. The direct dependence of food security for the economic development and the possibilities of providing necessary material means to achieve this goal are obvious. In addition, more dynamic disturbances due to pollution and destruction of the environment which enhances balance and diversifies dependency system are pressing on economic and social phenomena and have an increasing impact on the overall economic development and food security.

The food security issues are very complex and strictly dependent on country-specific economic development and environmental aspects, on the way they that are designed social policies [4], on the ability to produce food, stocks, and on the demand for food correlated with demographic and purchasing power of the population.

International common sense defines food security as a concept that encompasses all the measures to ensure access for all people at all times to enough food to enable an active life and good health.

We can say, however, that food security include aliments security issues, but not limited to them, it goes beyond the strict scope of consumption, with broad implications across the economic (production, transfer, distribution etc.), demographic, social, cultural and political and involving state institutions at the highest level by developing particularly complex pricing, social protection, foreign trade, economic development policies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### The food security policies

The food security policies developed at the national level must be thoroughly defined by reference to the real possibilities and urgent needs arising from the current food insecurity and the goals of sustainable development.

The causes of food insecurity are diverse [3]:

- lack of investment in agriculture in developing countries and the decline of official development assistance (ODA) in the agricultural field;
- low efficiency or lack of public programs to support agriculture;
- international trade liberalization that has also affected trade of agricultural products created by small farmers;

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- the existence of small farms under 2 hectares, which are not characterized by high efficiency (of the 525 million farms in the world, 404 million farms have an area under 2 ha, of which 87% are located in Asia)<sup>3</sup>;
- maintenance of restrictions on imports of agricultural products by certain countries such as India or Ukraine in order to protect domestic producers;
- rapid population growth in developing countries;
- poor harvests due to climate change;
- use of agricultural raw materials for production of biofuels.

Food security with two components: ensuring food availability per capita (calories and proteins) and purchasing power is achieved by linking food policies to nutrition policies. Food policy aims to provide the necessary quantity and quality of food for the entire population, at affordable prices.

The experience of industrialized countries is useful, but we should not lose from sight the differences in circumstances of their abundance of food and malnutrition or the malnutrition existing in other parts of the world. The gradual elimination or reduction of food insecurity is imperative in order to stop the dramatic degradation of health, which has long-term implications even on the chances of survival of a state.

The food safety policy in the European Union (EU) considers the whole chain of food intended for consumption by animals or humans. This includes stringent regulations and emphasizes extended producer and providers' responsibility regarding their participation in quality assurance food supply.

At European level, the quality and food safety is based on the efforts of all those involved in the complex chain that includes the agricultural production, processing, transportation and consumption. According to the European Union and the World Health Organization – food safety is everyone's responsibility, from their origin to the time they reach the table. To maintain food quality and safety throughout this chain, the specific procedures are necessary in order to ensure that foods are upright and monitoring procedures must be implemented to ensure the smooth completion of all operations.

To provide a transparent and scientific character for food regulation, there was a review of the food safety framework in the EU since the late 1990s, by creating new Scientific Committees and the European Food Safety Authority - EFSA as an independent organization that works closely with various scientific agencies and institutions from EU countries, providing independent scientific advice on all matters with direct or indirect impact on food safety. It covers all stages of food production and supply, making risk assessments in the food chain and scientific assessment on any matter that has a direct or indirect impact on food supply security, including health and good treatment of animal and plant health.

### **The relation between food security and food safety**

The foods produced in European Union countries are considered, at present, among the safest in the world. The Community experience has shown that the market economy has led to the production of food at and above the quantitative needs of populations in members' countries.

Although this created very large export availabilities, this development, covering food safety aspect has not solved the problem of food security [5]. The proof is the recent food crises in the EU, such as the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis - 1986-2000, crisis swine - 1997, dioxin crisis - 1999, FMD crisis - 2001, avian flu crisis - 2002.

To address these issues at EU level there have been several legislative and administrative restructuring measures [5], which culminated in the adoption of Regulation No. 178/2002 - "Food Safety Law" and the new package on hygiene - H1-H5 - published in 2004.

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<sup>3</sup> IASSTD, *Food Security in a Volatile World*, p. 3

### **The food safety – the Romanian perspective**

In Romania, for managing food safety issue the following institutions cooperate: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), the Ministry of Public Health (MPH), the National Authority for Consumer Protection (NACP) and the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (NSVFSA).

EU urged Romania, since 2002, the modernization and the restructuring of the food industry. The monitoring of food units, the establishment of the programs of modernization and restructuring to align with European requirements, debuted with the opening of EU accession negotiations and was intensified during the period 2003 to 2004.

Moreover, the food security was one of the most significant issues on the European Commission report of September 26, 2006, report that ratified the accession to the European Union. Thus, traders operating in the food industry and distribution must reorganize their activities in order to raise the standards.

Prior to accession to the European Union, in the matters of food safety, the following objectives were proposed [6]:

- an effective implementation of evaluation, management and risk communication systems;
- the oversight of agricultural markets and imports;
- the delineation and strengthening of control systems;
- imposing safeguards measures to protect the country's security against major diseases in of animals;
- the identification, assess and monitor of livestock and food industry units, in order to be the restructured and modernized;
- the completion of strategy for border inspection posts (eastern border of Romania, the European Union Border);
- the prompt and transparent information of consumers;
- the identification and registration of all animal species;
- the identification and registration of all farms and processing units;
- the complete computerization of veterinary and food safety systems.

In Romania, the main institution governing the work in the field is NSVFSA that acting on the basis of functional autonomy and decision-making. In 2003, following the recommendations of the EU institutions and its support through PHARE RO 0006.09 - "Strengthening quality control systems for agri-food products", the Romanian Food Safety Agency was established by Ordinance 90/08.2003[10]. It later merged with the National Sanitary Veterinary Agency and becomes Veterinary and Food Safety Agency. Organization and operation was carried out by HG 308/11.03.2004 and with the advent Law 215/24.05.2004 approving GO 42/01.2004, it was transformed into the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (NSVFSA).

The Agency is empowered to develop and promote, in cooperation with other authorities involved, the legal framework for safety and food quality. It also participates in standardization, grading and classification of food products in accordance with European quality standards, the Agency is responsible contact point and structure for Codex Alimentarius in our country. The Agency's strategy [11] is based on the principle that health surveillance of animals, sanitation of animal products and quality of these foods is a guarantee of safety throughout the food chain.

One of the most important European concepts, which are intended to be implemented in our country, is the **food traceability**. Applying this concept implies that all stages of the food chain elements can be tracked from origin to destination. The starting point is the action of identification and registration of animals. Through this, you can learn about all the steps that a food has traveled [12, 13] (*from stables to tables*).

Only gradually control may reduce the alimentary risk for the population, with all the benefits of its implementation. At all stages of the chain, the legal responsibility to achieve food security belongs to food operator, and role of the Agency is to monitor and control the compliance

of requirements and regulations. Therefore, this institution initiated, together with associations from the food industry, the establishment of requirements on codes of good practice and training needs for staff involved in food safety field.

Under the current legislation, the agency has the following powers in matters of food safety:

- coordinating the development and implementation of policy and legislation on food safety field;
- developing food safety standards for areas of competence required for all individuals and businesses;
- promotes and coordinates the implementation methodologies of risk assessment;
- assesses risk and recommends authorities the necessary measures when there is a major problem that can endanger human health;
- coordinates the development of codes of good practice, and supervision and control of food safety, from production of raw materials to the distribution of food to the consumer;
- implements government policies on food safety field;
- coordinates the activities regarding standards, food brands and licenses;
- coordinates the training of personnel involved in carrying out the activities regarding the supervision and control of food safety;
- provides scientific advice and technical assistance in cases provided by national and Community legislation;
- elaborates, upon request, national food safety programs with other institutions, and draft legislation to achieve specific tasks;
- coordinates at the national level the Rapid Alert System - RAS and is the national contact point;
- organizes state veterinary services and establish their financing needs and the tasks and responsibilities;
- issues scientific opinions on products other than food and feed, even those derived from genetically modified organisms as defined by Government Ordinance no. 49/2000 on the regime for obtaining, testing, operation and marketing of genetically modified organisms through modern biotechnology and products derived ;
- participates in standardization, grading and classification of food products in accordance with European quality standards.

In 2006 [7], the Food Safety General Directorate acted to further the commitments and recommendations made by representatives of the European Commission about the need for appropriate legislation and administrative capacity building in food safety.

In the medium and long term strategy, there have been set and achieved goals as: strengthening the institutional framework specifically improving methods for food control throughout the food chain, information campaigns, strengthening cooperation with associations and operators and improving the food consumers' confidence in the work of the Agency.

In the context of EU integration, one major priority was the implementation of food safety management using the system Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP - risk analysis and critical control points) in the food industry units. This system identifies, evaluates and controls the food safety risks.

The food safety management system is described in ISO 22000 [9], an international standard that specifies requirements for a food safety management system in a food chain, where an organization:

- must demonstrate the ability to control food safety hazards in order to provide safe end products that meet the food safety requirements appeal to customers and regulatory authority;
- aims to meet customers' satisfaction through effective control of food safety hazards, including processes to update the system.



The International Standard ISO 22000 specifies requirements to enable an organization to:

- plans, designs, implements, lead, maintain and update a food safety management system;
- evaluates and assess customer requirements and demonstrate compliance with mutually agreed customer requirements in relation to food safety;
- demonstrates effective communication with customers and other stakeholders along the food chain;
- demonstrates compliance with the applicable requirements of the regulatory authority in terms of food safety;
- ensures that they meet established food safety policies;
- shows this conformity to other stakeholders;
- requires certification or registration of safety management system powered by an external organization.

The International Standard ISO 22000 takes into account only the concerns about food safety issues but it does not discourage the integration of other aspects of management system elements such as quality (SR EN ISO 9001: 2001) and / or environmental protection (SR EN ISO 14001:2005).

Decisiveness of quality raw materials, unprocessed, for safety and quality of finished product required a systematic approach of the entire food trail to avoid cross contamination and identify potential risks. The phase transport in the food chain has a demanding legislation on standards of quality, including:

- EU legislation on hygiene and food safety on the mode of transport and storage;
- the rules of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) contain a chapter on food storage and delivery;
- Codex Alimentarius, established in 1962 by the World Health Organization - (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) that have preoccupations on the transport and storage of the foods.

The food processing stage is based on modern quality management systems to ensure product quality and safety for consumers. The three main systems in use are:

- Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP). They require processing conditions and processes - based on long experience - who have demonstrated the ability to ensure consistent quality and food safety.
- Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP). While traditional surveillance programs focused on food safety to identify problems in the finished product, HACCP, as a proactive technique, focuses on identifying potential risks and their control over the production process.
- Quality Assurance Standards. The adherence to standards established by the International Organization for Standardization - International Standards Organization (ISO 9000) and European Standards (EN 29000) ensure that food processing, catering and other food-related industries comply with the procedures prescribed a priori. Effectiveness of these programs is regularly assessed by independent experts.

These quality management systems used by food processors, includes the relationship with suppliers (farmers and wholesalers of raw materials), packaging and transport agents, vendors' products wholesale and retail to ensure procedures quality assurance at every level.

## CONCLUSIONS

Outside food business operators responsibilities, the role of consumer (regarded as the end point of the food chain) regarding the food safety practices remain highly relevant and can be successfully exercised only through awareness of rights and interests, and through education and adequate information on the requirements in the field of purchase, transport, storage and food preparation.

The current stage of development of the food industry, on the one hand, and the impossibility of complete elimination of risk - on the other - always bring to the attention new challenges to food safety. Issues such as contaminants and pollutants of food, extensive use of pesticides, food additives, genetically modified organisms, food irradiation are current challenges that require ongoing reassessments and improvements.

Existence of weaknesses, such as insufficient level of investment in the sector during the pre-accession, mismatch of the control activities, insufficient training of professionals, lack the capability of economic operators to be consistent with the new requirements, lack of communication between institutions that adequate coordination surveillance programs in food safety, the insufficient education and information raises difficulties in achieving national food security goal.

Moreover, the food security is not limited to safety component, but includes elements of availability, access and use of food, which highlights the multivalent necessary interventions and approaches.

Beyond the general framework outlined in the context of European integration, the nature of regulatory requirements of the *acquiscomunitaire*, our country is characterized by specific economic and cultural features which cannot be canceled or uniformed.

Ensuring appropriate national average consumption, both quantitatively and qualitatively, depends - in essence –on the improvement of the purchasing power of consumer, of the information and education of consumers, on the access to food resources and technologies for optimization of production, on increasing employment and social policies adopted.

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