

SPECIFICITY ELEMENTS CONCERNING AGRO-ALIMENTARY PRODUCT AT THE LEVEL OF EUROPEAN UNION

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Agricultural and alimentary products' marketing displays at the level of European Union a series of specificity elements resulted especially from the means of manifestation and environment variables. Among the external environment components the striking influence of legislative environment is highlighted, agro-alimentary sectors making the object of an impressive number of communitarian settlements, which regard not only the production manner, but the price stability, distribution and communication concerning the agro-alimentary products as well. In the present article there were reproduced some of the main specificity elements of agro-alimentary product at the level of communitarian market, an important part from these being the result of strict legislative measures that regard the insurance of consumers' protection, alimentary safety and security.

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Agro-alimentary products marketing displays a series of particularities that results mainly from the nature of the needs to which the agro-alimentary products address to, but also from the demand and offer characteristics for this category of products, particularities highlighted at the level of all components of marketing mix. Presenting implicitly agro-alimentary marketing specific particularities in general, at the level of European Union agricultural and alimentary products marketing displays a series of specificity elements resulted from the manner of manifestation of factors specific to different environment components. Among these the obvious influence of legislative environment is highlighted; the agricultural and alimentary sectors making the objective of an impressive number of communitarian settlements, that regard not only the production manner but the price establishing, distribution and communication concerning the agro-alimentary products.

In what the agro-alimentary product is concerned a defining element at the level of communitarian market is referred to **products' quality**, these should answer to some strict settlements that regard **the insurance of consumers' protection, alimentary safety and security**.

Therefore, at the level of communitarian market (with the purpose of insurance the consumers' alimentary safety and security, for their good information and for guarantying the transactions correctness) a special attention is paid to (official) control of alimentary products⁵²⁹, the control regarding, alike, alimentary products, alimentary additives, vitamins, mineral salts, oligoelements and other products added to aliments and sold in the same time with these, as well as the materials that have contact with alimentary products. There are submitted to control the raw materials and the ingredients used for aliments fabrication, finite and semi-finite elements, labeling and presenting manners for alimentary products and even the consumption manners and products used for cleaning and maintenance (inclusive pesticides), staff hygiene etc. All enterprises from agro-alimentary sectors have the obligation of respecting the hygiene rules during the whole route covered by alimentary product: processing, conditioning, distribution, sell.

In order to insure the population's protection on communitarian level the compulsoriness for aliments producers of specifying and sending towards analysis the chemical substances used in fabrication process⁵³⁰ is established. Also, the bottling methods and commercializing the sparkling water were settled, the producers having the obligation of insuring the chemical analysis for commercialized water's purity⁵³¹.

On the 12th of January 2000 The White Book of Alimentary Safety was adopted, that foresees the establishing of an independent authority concerning the aliments safety – The European Authority for Aliments Safety⁵³², whose purpose is the insuring of scientific control concerning the aliments production. This organism will elaborate scientific notices in which basis the minimum and maximum levels of vitamins and minerals in aliments will be established.

In what the **use of alimentary additives**⁵³³ is concerned, the communitarian settlements⁵³⁴ establish that their use should answer to one of the following purposes: preserving or insuring the product's stability, the prolonging the

529 Directive nr. 89/397/CEE.

530 Commission Settlement 622/2002/CE.

531 Directive 80/777/CEE.

532 Established by Commission's Settlement nr.178/2002. In Romania, the correspondent organism is Healthy Alimentation Foundation.

533 Alimentary additives refer to the substances that are not consumed as aliments, do not constitute a characteristic ingredient for the alimentary product and are added in alimentary products in different stages of processing, conditioning, transport or storage, becoming therefore a compound of the products.

534 Directive nr.1989/107/CEE, Directive nr. 2002/46/CE.

product's preservation or stability duration, the improvement of sensorial properties. The settlements regard the alimentary additive that are used or intended to use as ingredients during production or preparing of an aliment and remain present in the final product, even in the modified shape. The additives whose use is accepted make the object of a list, the specific use conditions being established. Therefore, the approval of alimentary additive is attended by an indication of products where it will be used as well as the used quantity, a minimum and maximum level of alimentary additive being established. The framing of a certain additive in a category does not exclude the possibility of its use authorization for another domain also. The additive use is allowed in the case when the technologic fabrication process of an aliment is imposed (not existing other solution) and only if does not constitute risk for humane healthiness.

In the case of **products designated to special alimentation**, respective the "dietetic" or "regime" products (designed to persons with digestive or metabolism disturbances, and to persons with special physiologically conditions) as well as the aliments designed to small age children (sucker and babies), communitarian rules⁵³⁵ that regard the exigencies concerning the products' nature and composition, raw materials quality, in the hygiene domain, a list with the substances that can be added in certain nutritional purposes whose use is allowed, labeling, presenting and publicity, such as their control manner are established. The qualifier of "dietetic" and "regime" can be attributed to current consumption products only if there can be adequate to a special alimentation and only if the proof of these properties is made.

Concerning the **genetically modified products** (that make the object of last minute vast debates on global level) the EC Council sent directives referring to the deliberate obtaining and use in environment, of genetically modified aliments and organisms. Due to humane diseases appearance, but also of animals and plants, as result of releasing in environment of genetically modified organisms, their introduction should be made progressive and permanently analyzing the long term effects⁵³⁶. The alimentary products that contain genetically modified organisms will be appropriate labeled, mentioning the possible effects that can have on the human organism⁵³⁷.

In what the **agro-alimentary products' wrapping** is concerned, the materials used in this purpose and that have direct contact with the product⁵³⁸ make the object of special settlements. These materials should be produced, in such manner that would not give to alimentary products ingredients in such a quantity that could affect peoples' safety or to lead to unacceptable changes in aliments composition, or to degradation their organoleptic characteristics. The directive is not applicable to wrapping materials that can be consumed in the same time with the product (for instance membranes used for meat rough-wrought - sausages and salamis etc.). Materials that are allowed to enter in contact with aliments are therefore established, the list of additive that can be used at materials and objects production that enter in contact with aliments, substances whose use is authorized, the purity criteria of these substances, their use conditions, migration limits of some ingredients in/on alimentary products etc. The list of the accepted materials-substances may suffer changes according to new information's existence, leading either authorization of new substances or to the prohibition of others. Special settlements regard "active" materials used for products' wrapping, respective the materials that lead to a prolonging of conservation period of alimentary products, to improving of their organoleptic proprieties⁵³⁹. Concerning the agro-alimentary products' wrapping the EU legislation regards the inscribing on the wrapping, in harmonized manner, of the contained mass and volume⁵⁴⁰.

In what the **alimentary importation products** are concerned the present settlements regard the realization of controls of products at the entrance in the communitarian space. The finding of a product (lot of products) by customs authorities that contains characteristics that may bring doubts concerning the alimentary safety, as well as the absence of a document (marker) that should accompany the product in order to respond to settlements concerning the alimentary safety, entails the right of stopping the commercialization of the respective product⁵⁴¹. Also, in order to enter the European Union's market the agro-alimentary products should be fabricated in HACCP.⁵⁴²

Result of measures that regard the alimentary safety and security, as well as result of public opinion's awareness upon the importance of a healthy alimentation, in European Union a special importance is given to **ecological products**, increasing their average in the total of the offer of agro-alimentary products.

Actually, ecological agriculture appeared in Europe as a result of population lack of trust in measures of alimentary safety and as consequence of apparition of different diseases generated by products containing toxins. Therefore, in present we assist to a real movement on European level that militates for replacing the intensive, industrial technologies, based on the use of extra-fertilizers of agricultural terrain, hormones etc. in animals alimentation, with clean, not-pollutant technologies. Ecological agriculture places an important stress on products' natural quality

535 Board's Directive nr. 89/398/CEE, Directive nr. 2001/15/CE, Directive nr. 91/321/CEE, Directive 1999/39/CE.

536 Directive 18/01/CEE.

537 Board's settlement 1139/98.

538 Directive nr. 2002/16/CE.

539 Settlement 1935/2004/CE.

540 Directive nr. 76/211/CEE.

541 Settlement CEE nr. 339/1993.

542 Settlement 852/2004/CE.

and not on obtaining of increased productivity, its cost being implicitly higher. In this frame, the evolution of ecological products consumption, in some countries from European Union registered spectacular increases; according to the available data was observed that in 1997 – 2006 period, in some countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Holland) the consumption increasing more than 10 times.

The evolution of organic products' consumption in some of the European Union's countries in 1997-2006 period

Country	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005*	2006*
Euro / person										
Austria	24.6	32.1	40.6	53.5	68.4	92.2	122.6	163.0	205.5	244.6
Belgium	6.5	8.3	13.8	21.1	30.3	37.4	45.6	59.9	75.1	97.0
Denmark	59.0	85.1	97.2	122.3	161.9	218.6	293.0	394.0	513.1	636.0
Finland	m.d.	m.d.	m.d.	41.8	53.4	75.1	115.6	159.9	213.6	300.3
France	9.9	10.7	15.9	22.9	31.2	41.1	51.0	61.4	77.6	99.1
Germany	19.4	24.0	28.6	33.0	40.0	47.4	56.3	65.8	78.0	93.3
Greece	m.d.	m.d.	m.d.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Ireland	m.d.	m.d.	m.d.	11.5	19.1	26.2	33.9	43.4	53.5	68.0
Italy	9.2	11.6	14.7	20.6	30.0	38.3	49.5	61.2	74.9	90.0
Holland	19.9	24.2	29.8	47.7	68.8	91.3	120.8	157.7	187.4	224.2
Portugal	m.d.	m.d.	m.d.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Spain	m.d.	m.d.	m.d.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
Sweden	18.8	26.9	35.6	45.0	55.8	70.4	82.7	94.1	108.1	126.5

m.d. – missing data.

* estimated data.

Source: data processing from *Euromonitor*, 2004

Referring to the **agro-alimentary products' standardization** – whose main purpose is, also, the one of assuring products' quality on one side and, in equal extend, it constitutes a recognition method for consumers for quality products – at the level of EU will be altogether applied, the international standards that, generally, have a recommendation character, allowing the national standards harmonization, but also a series of specific standards that are compulsory for EU countries. Among the organisms that elaborates standards at international level we remind: International Standardization Organization (I.S.O.) and Codex Alimentarius Commission (common organism for OMS and FAO), and at the level of European Union – European Standardization Committee (CEN).

Although it has international character, in European Union *the aliments safety systems' implementation HACCP* is compulsory⁵⁴³, aspect that constitutes actually the alimentary safety guaranty along the entire technologic flux. Respective, HACCP is a method for insuring the aliments product's security from the raw material until the product reaches the final consumers' table. The purpose of this method accepted by international organizations as the most efficient control method for diseases resulted from alimentary products, is the prevention in time of problems that may appear along the route by alimentary products from agrarian exploitation until the reaching of consumers.

The basic principles of HACCP are: “the potentially alimentary risks analysis for an operation from the activity of alimentary sector's unit; the identifying of the points from this operation where alimentary risks may appear; the establishing of the identified points as being critical for aliments safety, named critical points; the identification and implementation of effective control procedures and monitoring these points; the periodical revision and every time a change in the alimentary sector of alimentary risks analysis appears, of critical points and of monitoring procedures ”⁵⁴⁴. In the cases where, due to different reasons the control was lost, the products submitted to potential risk will not reach the consumer. HACCP follows the assuring of product's security by biologic, chemical and physical risk control analysis from the producing, procuring and handling the raw material, until the producing, distribution and consumption of the finite product. “Units from the alimentary sector have to identify the determinant activities for alimentary safety and have to guarantee that the corresponding security procedures are established, implemented, maintained and revised on the basis of principles used in *risk and critical points system analysis - HACCP*”⁵⁴⁵.

The realization of HACCP system supposes the adopting of certain standards, which have been elaborated by Codex Alimentarius Commissions, respective:

- *Agro-alimentary hygiene. General principles* – regards the necessary hygiene conditions for an aliment's production, during its entire production route;

543 Directive 93/43/CEE.

544 Processing after H.G. 1198/2002 (harmonized to communitarian aquis) published in MO 866/2 December 2002 concerning the alimentary hygiene standards approval.

545 Article 4 from H. G. 1198/2002.

- *Agro-alimentary hygiene. Risk analysis and critical points control analysis (HACCP) and their application guide*
- the risk analysis principles are established, critical control points, risks identification methods and control measures;
- *Agro-alimentary hygiene. Principles for establishing the microbiologic criteria for aliments at any point from the alimentary chain.*

With the exception of HACCP system, a series of standards with international character are also used by economic agents from agro-alimentary domain at the level of communitarian market, their implementation being optional:

- *Alimentary safety management system- ISO 22000*, is an international standard, elaborated for assuring the alimentary chains safety on global level; it comprises the HACCP principles and integrates the requires of the key standards elaborated by different distributors' associations, on global level. ISO 22000 extends the quality management system approach;
- *Quality management system - ISO 9001:2000*, is a standard that foresees the requires for quality management system, in such manner that the organizations will assure products and services according to consumer's requires;
- *Environment management system ISO 14001*, is an international standard that specifies the requires referring to an environment management system that allows an organization to formulate and implement its policies and objectives taking onto consideration the legal requires and the other requires that the organization subscribes, as well as the information referring to significant impact upon environment.

At the level of European Union there exist four categories of standards applicable to agro-alimentary products:

- *specification standards*, with reference to composition, physic-chemical and biologic characteristics and fabrication technologies;
- *standards concerning the products' "environment"*, referring to the labeling, wrapping, storage and products' transport;
- *standards concerning the products' analysis and testing methods*, that regards the products' analysis manners;
- *standards with the purpose of directive*, that define the hygiene requires, as well as a series of prescriptions referring to the fabrication, stocking and distribution technology.

In conclusion, the specificity of agro-alimentary product at the level of European Union, also as the specificity of all marketing mix components, results in great extend from the nature of the settlements regarding the population's alimentary safety and security, but also from the necessity of adaptation to permanent change needs and increased exigencies of the European consumer.

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