

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## Albanian typical products as a tool towards sustainable rural development

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### Abstract:

The turn of consumers towards quality, healthy and safe food products results in a new definition of quality that refers to: i). their geographical origin ii). their freshness and seasonality; iii) the environmentally friendly or healthy production techniques; iv). the producers themselves, since societal relationships play an important role between producer and consumer [2]. Thus, there exist certified agro-food products of a spatial character such as the Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) and the Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs) and certified agro-food products of an a-spatial character such as the organic products [11]. The main goal of our case study is the identification of Korça typical products, PDO and PGI potential products and their contribution to the sustainable rural development in order to designing the policy intervention framework in the future. This study is based on a structured survey with the: i.) farmers/producers (381 interviews), ii.) working personnel in various public agencies, iii.) the businessmen and businesswomen. Moreover, a number of secondary data by public agencies of Korça region, farmers associations, etc.), but also by University papers and studies and scientific journals have been used. A series of elements regarding perceptions and attitudes among consumers was measured, using basic descriptive statistics analysis to describe the responses of the sample under study. According to this study, most consumers prefer their products based on origin that brings to a conclusion that PDOs or PGIs, or Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSGs) must be promoted through a Public Private partnership.

**Keywords:** quality, food, PDO, PGI, Korça, partnership.

### Introduction

Albania has favorable climatic conditions for a wide range of agricultural products including organic products and other quality products such PDOs and PGIs. In this context, understanding consumer preferences and behavior is important in the related decision-making of key stakeholders. This consumer study provides insight into consumer behavior and preferences towards organic and other quality products.

This paper is based on a structured survey targeting about 380 producers/processors in Korça, which also represents the main potential market oriented. Questioner covers information about producers typical products as well as consumer socio-demographic factors as well as preferences and perceptions for organic products and other potential quality products such as PDOs and PGIs - questioner was designed based on EU regulations and also an extensive literature review, and consultations with agricultural economists, scholars and practitioners. A series of elements regarding perceptions and attitudes

among Albanian consumers was measured, using basic descriptive statistics analysis to describe the responses of the sample under study. Subsequently, cluster analysis (two-step clustering technique) was applied to group consumers according to a chosen set of indicators, in order to analyze their differences in their perceptions and preferences of quality products.

According to the study results, most producers/consumers prefer domestic quality products. More than half of respondents prefer to buy quality products directly from the producers or on the farm especially for fresh fruit and vegetables. Most consumers are willing to pay a premium for quality products. However, it appears that most consumers do not have clear understanding of quality product characteristics or definitions.

### 2. Material and Methods

The method followed in this paper includes:

- the theoretical examination of the various categories and the various categories of quality agro-food products, both certified and non certified. Assessing sustainability of human activities/notions,

several aspects needed to be taken into account, such as, on the one hand, the temporal and spatial dimensions, on the other hand, the social, economic, environmental and institutional dimensions and the correlations between them. In this regard is analyzed the notion of quality and are examined the various categories of quality agro-food (certified and non-certified products, organic products, PDO and PGI potential products, traditional products, etc.). The quality of agro-food systems and their contribution to the sustainable rural development, especially of the mountain and less favored areas (EU notions as well as Albanian current state on these categories).

*The identification of local primary/processed products in Korça region.* This description shows which are the most important cultivations in the Korça region (e.g. based on the cultivated area, on the number of farmers, etc.), the most important agro-food products produced, and the various categories of quality agro-food products produced there (e.g. Organic products, PDO/PGI potential products, traditional products, etc.). To make this description as good as possible, a number of contacts with the: i.) farmers/producers (191 interviews for primary local products, and about 200 interviews for agro food products), ii.) working personnel in various public agencies took place (Chamber of Commerce, private Tourism agencies, etc), but also iii.) Interviews with the businessmen and businesswomen who produced the quality agro-food products. In total 50 interviews took place during July and August 2013 with the use of an open questionnaire that dealt with issues about the productive structure of the enterprises, the raw material used for the production of their products. Moreover, a number of secondary data by public agencies (Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration), Chamber of Commerce of Korça, Agricultural Regional Directorate of Korça region, farmers associations, etc.), but also by University papers and studies and scientific journals have been used.

This selection is also based on specific criteria, which are analyzed in detail. It must be noted that the selection of criteria happened in collaboration with the personnel of the Regional Council of Korça and the businessmen and businesswomen of the agro-food enterprises, restaurants and hotel owners.

- The traditional recipes, which utilize the selected products are also analyzed and described in details. Those recipes in some cases pre-exist and

are described in detail in other project papers and publications. The interviews with local actors such Touristic agencies, restaurants, housewife's, business woman, etc. have been taken into consideration as well. In other cases the recipes presented on this paper are found in recipe cookbooks, or are the recipes that are used from the enterprises or restaurants and hotels included in our interviews.

The theoretical examination of the various categories:

**TYPICAL PRODUCTS** are the PDO and PGI products; wines DOC, DOCG and IGT; Products deserving the community recognition for the achievement of which are used raw materials of particular value.

**TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS** are obtained through methods of processing, storage and curing the roots of which are consolidated over time (at least 25 years) and dig in the most ancient and traditional craft production of their particular geographical areas.

Elements that define a food product "typical" are:

- i. The natural and human resources used in its production are specific to an area
- ii. The tradition of the production process: the "know how" particularly local
- iii. The collective of knowledge of the process in an area / territory
- iv. The link with the geographical environment and cultural heritage of an area

European Quality policy aims of the EU-Scheme on PDOs/PGIS/TSGs: i). to encourage diverse agricultural production; ii). to improving the incomes of farmers and retaining the rural populations in these areas; iii). to protect names from misuse and imitation; iv). to help consumers to understand the specific character of the product.

This paper is based on a structured survey targeting 381 producers/processors in Korça, which also represents the main potential typical primary/secondary products in the area. Questioner covers information about different topics as shown in Table 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

**Table 1.** Details of the producers/products

(a)

Nr.	producer/name	location/village	name of product (a)
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**Table 2.** Description of product/characteristics (b)

<i>description of product/characteristics (b)</i>					
physical			weight/grams	chemical/the content of nutrient elements	microbiological/organoleptic: sweet/spicy/neutral/etc.(specify)
color	size	shape: round/oval			

**Table 3.** Description of the production method (c) (part 1)

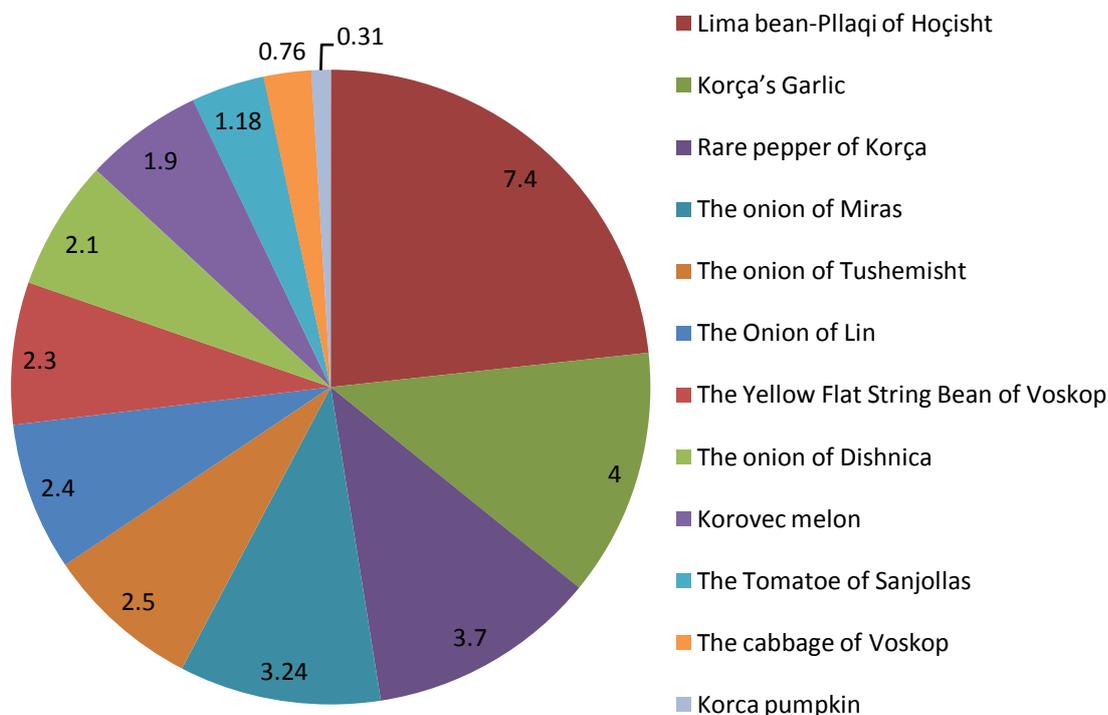
<i>geographical extent</i>	<i>the area planted</i>						<i>potential for extend the cultivated surface</i>
	self consumption	for sale/fresh consumption	industrial processing	export	total planted surface	total quantity kv/year	

**Table 4.** Description of the production method (c) (part 2)

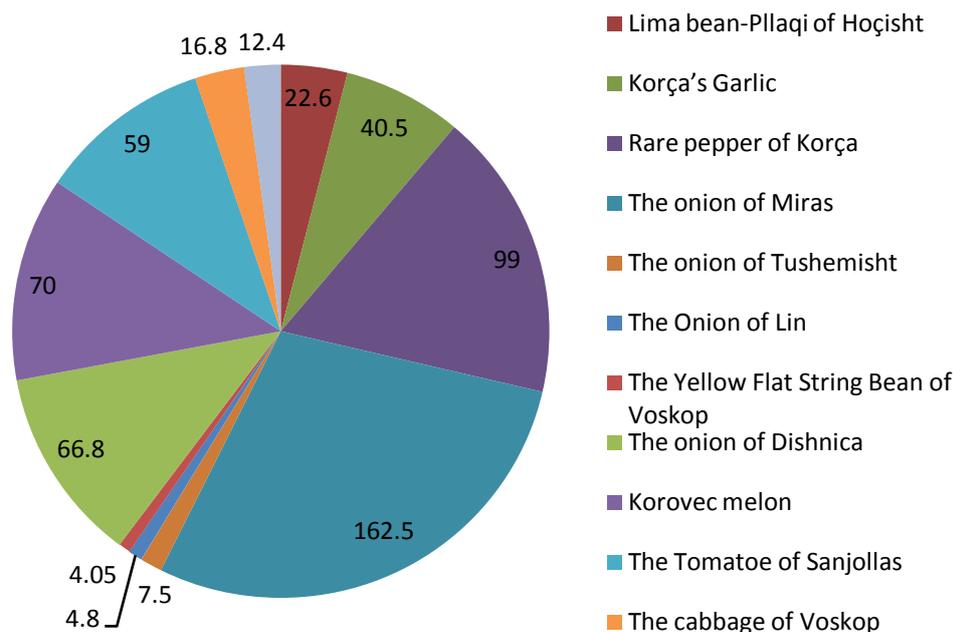
type of land	<i>method of planting</i>									
	min&max tOC	monthly&annual rainfall (mm)	seed	saplings	bulbs	ripening time	on water	under water	planting distance and number of plants/ha	time of harvest

**Table 5.** Product's specific character (d) & historical details/traditional character (e)

product's specific character (d)			historical details/traditional character (e)	
nutritive usage	different taste from similar products	etc (specify)	bibliography references/studies	legend used by people over the years



**Figure 1.** Planted surface in Ha of primary typical products in Korça region



**Figure 2.** Production in tons of primary typical products in Korça region

Based on data taken from questionnaires, in the figure 1 and 2 it is shown the planted surface and the production of the primary typical products of the Korça region.

#### Findings:

The large extension of the potential variety of the local production of primary sector in agriculture and livestock of the Korça region is a real trend.

Farm size consolidation represents a positive trend, but it is slow and negatively effects efficiency. Given the slow pace of farm consolidation process which hampers economies of scale (necessary to compete in terms of efficiency), it is necessary to look for other alternatives – which could include organic farming or other quality production systems, such as local typical products.

Typical products are small in quantities and the cost of production is relatively high. In all cases, even when they are produced as organic, they are sold as conventional products, so with a huge lost of added value;

The concept of typical products is not clear by many interviewed consumers. For example, most consumers state that processed agrifood products may not be typical/bio;

The market for typical product in Albania is still small, but the consumers' willingness to pay supports the potential for market development.

Most consumers consider that the most important dimension of the organic /PDOs and PGIs products is related to health;

#### Recommendations:

Compiling in-depth regional and sectorial analysis identifying rural areas and sectors with common development priorities based upon identical basic characteristics, needs and potentials for economic development;

Fostering investment needs for Small Scale Processing and Marketing of Local and Traditional Products;

The state of consumers' knowledge on typical products, PDO, PGI, TSGs calls for a consumer education campaign on the typical product concept, health and environmental benefits and other related issues;

Typical, PDO, PGI, TSGs products labelling should contain information regarding content;

The preference of consumers to buy directly from producer/on farm, represents a potential for agritourism development and for the establisher of farmers marketing cooperatives;

The consumers' willingness to pay a premium for reliable bio products should be considered by policies and programmes in terms of putting special focus on certification programmes;

The perceptions on link between typical/certified products and health related issues represent an important advantage for production and can be

capitalized in marketing promotions by producers/traders;

There must be greater effort to support the quality agro-food products, which are produced in the Korça region by the restaurants and hotels of the area. In the restaurants, the menus should provide more data about their characteristics, their production methods, the companies which produce the products or other specificities.

There must be a better utilization of the PDO and PGI certifications. Since in Korça region due to the lack of national legislation there is no any PDO, PGI registered product, we recommend as follow:

Increase the availability of administrative data (such as, for example, the number of controls) and statistical data (such as, for example, the size of the agricultural areas devoted to the production of PDOs/PGI, value and volume of production and sales).

This recommendation is addressed to public institutions to developing with other actors a collection system of administrative and economic data on PDOs/PGIs. The national institutions responsible for agricultural statistics would be best placed to undertake such an exercise;

A higher level of information and support tend to result in more registrations: To the extent that producers of PDOs/PGIs benefit from the scheme, it could be worth investing some resources in increasing producer awareness of the scheme and its benefits;

Actively promote the scheme and stronger provision of support for the applicant: This recommendation is primarily addressed to the policy makers and other actors involved but there is also scope for the Government to engage in such promotional activities;

Undertake an active communication campaign to raise consumer knowledge of the PDO/PGI scheme and the PDO/PGI symbols: The non-information on origin of raw materials in the case of PGIs may cause, at times, consumer confusion about the true origin of the ingredients used in some PGIs;

Consider ways to increase information about raw material ingredients in PGIs by, for example, providing detailed origin information on at least the main ingredients on the PGI package: This would

address consumers concerns about traceability and sourcing of ingredients and eliminate any potential confusion about the geographical source of ingredients in PGIs;

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