

## TYPICAL PRODUCTS OF KORÇA REGION AS A TOOL TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA

Fatmira Allmuça<sup>1\*</sup>, Xhevaire Dulja<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Directorate of Programming and Evaluation of Rural Policies, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration, Skenderbej Square, No 2, 1001 Tirana, Albania

<sup>2</sup>Rural Tourism Management Department, Agricultural University of Tirana, Kamez, 1000 Tirana, Albania

\*e-mail: miraallmuca@gmail.com

### Abstract

Korça region possesses important potentials for the development of quality products given the cultural, climatic, cultural and territorial diversity. As in all Albanian territory, the farm size in Korça region is small 1.2 - 1.4 ha. Even though farm size consolidation represents a positive trend, it is slow and negatively effects efficiency that brings to the necessity to look for other alternatives such as quality production systems, PDO, PGI, TSGs (local typical products). The increase of farm income is related with the increase of value-added of agricultural products and agro-food by linking them with a certain territory (Barjolle *et al.* [1]).

This study is based on a structured survey with the: i.) Farmers/producers questionnaires and surveys, ii.) Working personnel in various public agencies, iii.) 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.

**Key words:** Quality, Food, PDO, PGI, TSG, Korça, Tourism.

### 1. Introduction

**Typical products** are the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI); wines DOC, DOCG and IGT; the products worthy

of recognition from community for the realization of which is used raw materials of particular merit/value.

**Traditional products (TSG)** 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 as “typical” are:

1. Natural and human resources used for its production are specific to an area.
2. Tradition of the production process: the “know how” particularly local.
3. Collective knowledge of the process in an area/territory.
4. Connection with the geographical environment and cultural heritage of an area.

European Quality policy aims that the EU-Scheme on PDOs/PGIs/TSGs to: i). Encourage diverse agricultural production; ii). Improve incomes of farmers and retaining the rural populations in these areas; iii). Protect names from misuse and imitation; iv). Help consumers to understand the specific character of the product. PDO, PGI, and TSGs products are subject of different EU Regulations and are labeled with appropriate logos (Figure 1).



Regulation (EC) Nr. 510/2006



Regulation (EC)Nr.509/2006

**Figure 1. European Quality policy**

### 1.1 PDO/PGI in Albania

The domestic policies and relevant instruments regarding the recognition and protection of geographical indications and traditional names on agricultural and food products are in their infancy in Albania. Elements of such policy are included in the Law no. 9863, "On Food", and dated 28.1.2008. By this law, geographical indications and traditional names of products are similarly protected through trademarks and in particular, the certified trademarks in accordance with the Law no. 9947, "On Industrial Property", dated 7.7.2008. This law sets out rules and basic components that may be used for the identification of origin and geographical indications of foodstuffs, necessary indications to be used for a product that is considered "a food traditional product", the method of registration of products with the indication "traditional food product", as well as the registration and de-registration of these products.

Conclusions drawn from this study, which can be utilized by the local stakeholders, but also by the policy-makers, but also suggestions for the better utilization of the quality agro-food produced in the Korça region. The conclusions/recommendations can be the basis for a long-term strategy that will result in economic, social, environmental benefits for the Korça region.

The aim of this study is the identification of Korça typical products, PDO and PGI potential products in order to designing the policy intervention framework in the future.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This paper is based on 391 structured questionnaires targeting producers/processors and 50 semi-structured interviews targeting various business owners that produce qualitative local products and public agencies, which also represents the main market oriented potential in Korça.

Moreover, a number of non-published and published data have been used such as: data from public agencies (Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration), Chamber of Commerce of Korça, Agricultural Regional Directorate of Korça, region, farmers associations, etc.), Albanian University papers, studies and scientific journals.

The 391 questionnaires and 50 semi-structured interviews were conducted as following:

1. 191 questionnaires with farmers regarding agricultural local products so-called primary products;
2. 200 questionnaires with processors regarding local processed food products;
3. 30 interviews with working personnel in various public agencies (Chamber of Commerce, private Tourism agencies, consumers, etc);

4. 20 interviews with the businessmen and businesswomen who produced the quality agro-food products.

Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews are conducted during July - August 2013.

They were based on EU regulations 509/2006 and 510/2006 and covered information about producers of typical products, consumers socio-demographic data, as well as preferences and perceptions for the potential quality products such as PDOs and PGIs. Questionnaire design was based on EU regulations, literature review, and consultations with agronomists and agricultural economists, scholars and practitioners.

The main issues discussed in the questionnaires were:

#### 1. Details of the producers/products

(a): *producer/name; location/village; name of product.*

#### 2). description of product/characteristics

(b): *physical: color/ size/ shape: round/oval/ weight/ grams, chemical/the content of nutrient elements, microbiological/organoleptic: sweet/spicy/neutral/etc.*

#### 3). Description of the production method

(c) (part 1): *geographical extent, the area planted: self consumption/ for sale/fresh consumption/ industrial processing/export/ total planted surface/ total quantity kv/year/ potential for extend the cultivated surface.*

#### 4). Description of the production method

(c) (part 2): *method of planting: type of land/ min/maximal monthly/annual rainfall (mm)/seed/ saplings/ bulbs/ ripening time/ on water/ under water/ planting distance and number of plants/ha/ time of harvest/ time and method of traditional conservation (storage).*

#### 5). Product's specific character

(d): *nutritive usage/ different taste from similar products/ etc.*

#### 6). Historical details/traditional character

(e): *bibliography references/studies/ legend used by people over the years.*

Interviews that dealt with issues about the productive structure of the enterprises, the raw material used for the production of their products.

Selection of products analyzed was based on specific criteria. The specific criteria were defined 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.

This identification of products was a result of following questions:

- Which are the most important cultivars in the Korça region (based on the: cultivated area, the number of farmers, the possibility of extension and final destination)?

- Which are the most important agro-food processed products?
- What is the level of the agro-food products quality produced for various categories (e.g.: PDO/PGI potential products, traditional products, etc.)?

### 3. Results and Discussion

The origin of the product is the fundamental principle governing the European concept of giving and protecting the name of the product where it is produced. These products now attract the attention of all disciplines for their role in rural development and local development and in the creation of equitable relations between producers and consumers (Bérard L., Marchenay Ph. [2]).

Albania possesses important potentials for development of quality local products given to the high climatic, cultural, territorial and product diversity. Moreover, Geographic Indication (GI) would become a pertinent option for the maintenance of agricultural sector in Albania especially in mountainous areas for a series of factors such as: the sensitivity of consumers toward origin of agricultural products, the growing integration of farms in the market, and the consolidation of legal and institutional framework regarding GI registration

and protection (Imami D., and Skreli E. [4], FAO [3]). According to the survey results and Albanian literature [3, 4, and 5], the origin of production is quite an important attribute for most Albanian consumers.

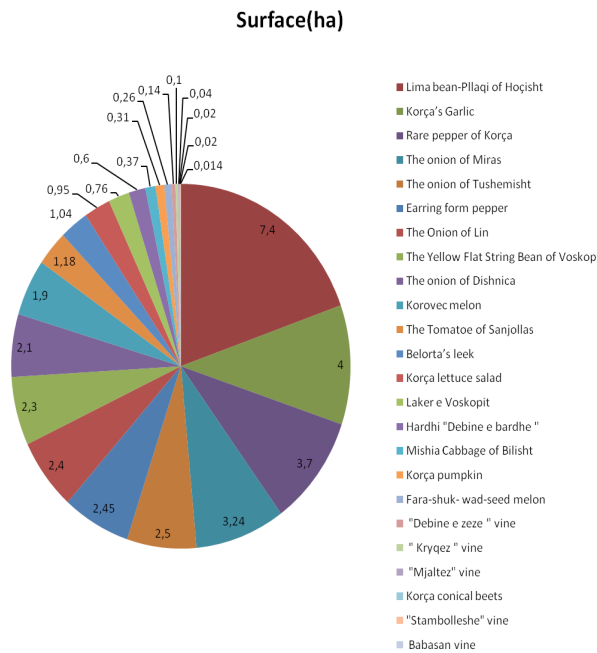
According to this study, most consumers choose their products according its origin (domestic versus imports), and by far they are preferring domestic products. It was noted that within domestic products, there are significant differences in perceptions in regard with the region of production within Albania. Most interviewees stated that the region/area of origin is respectively very important or important when deciding/choosing to buy Albanian products. There is clear pattern of regional preferences for a number of products. Based on typical product that are associated to specific regions, the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO); Protected Geographical Indications (PGI), or Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) take an importance role as such they have to be promoted through a Public Private partnership.

Based on data taken from questionnaires, the following table shows the typical products, identified in Korça region.

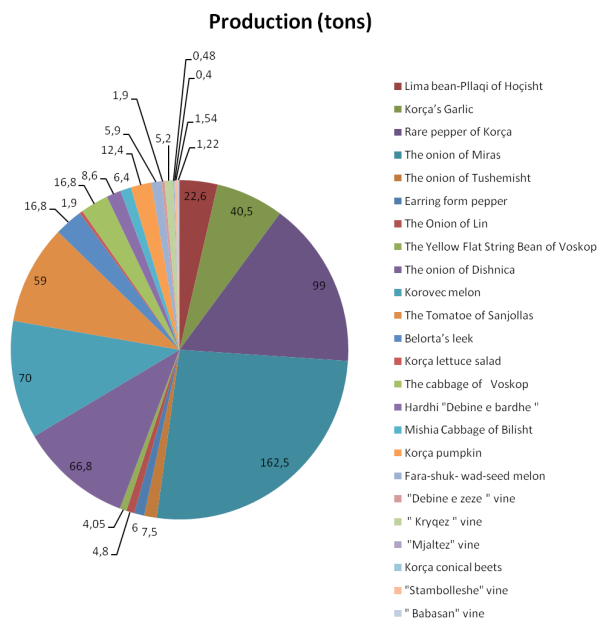
The share of surface in hectares and production in tones of each primary typical product of Korça region is presented in the following graphs.

**Table 1. Typical primary products identified in Korça region**

Nr	Product Name	Nr	Product Name
1	Lima bean-Pllaqi of Hoçisht	13	Korça lettuce salad
2	Korça's Garlic	14	The cabbage of Voskop
3	Rare pepper of Korça	15	"Debine e bardhe" vine
4	The onion of Miras	16	Mishia Cabbage of Bilisht
5	The onion of Tushemisht	17	Korça pumpkin
6	Earring form pepper	18	Fara-shuk- wad-seed melon
7	The Onion of Lin	19	"Debine e zeze" vine
8	The Yellow Flat String Bean of Voskop	20	"Kryqez" vine
9	The onion of Dishnica	21	"Mjaltez" vine
10	Korovec melon	22	Korça conical beets
11	The Tomato of Sanjollas	23	"Stambolleshe" vine
12	Belorta's leek	24	"Babasan" vine



**Figure 2. Planted surface of Primary typical products in Korça region in hectares**



**Figure 3. Production of primary typical products in Korça region in tons**

According to the data of the questionnaire, 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:

- The concept of typical products is not clear by many interviewed consumers. For example, most consumers state that processed agri-food products may not be typical.

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

- 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 it has negative effect on efficiency.

- Typical products are small in quantities and the cost of its 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.

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

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- The current statement of the Korça local primary and processed products together with consumer attitude toward them is the main encouraging result of the study. This would be used as an important resource for agricultural and territorial development.

- The preference of consumers to buy directly from producer/on farm, represents a potential for agri-tourism development and establishment of farmers marketing cooperatives.

- 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 that produce the products or other specificities.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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/TSGs registered product, we recommend as follow:
- 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;
- Typical, PDO, PGI, TSGs products labeling should contain information regarding content;
- 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;
- 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.

## 5. References

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