

STUDY REGARDING THE ROMANIAN FOOD QUALITY

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Abstract:

It's pretty hard to say about a product: yes, it is quality. What is actually the quality of the food? It's enough that product have a quality certificate or be showy, or tasty? Are all of these issues make us do not know what is best for us, buyers, and make decision process more difficult? We will try to clarify these issues and to understand what is actually the quality of food in general, and Romanian food quality in particular. Quality of food is very complex and we need to understand all aspects of this.

Keywords: Quality of foods, quality standards, security, use value

1. Introduction

The recent researches show that most consumers change their preferences for certain products because of a low quality and then, due to price or other reasons. Typically, the consumer is willing to pay extra to get better quality.

The experience of countries with developed market economy shows that a product, to be requested by the consumers, not enough to be only good quality, but more important is to match price with quality. On these markets consumers have a choice (depending on the quality/price ratio) necessary product that is generally so designed and constructed that it does not endanger the health and life or the quality of the environment.

Usually, if quality/price ratio is higher, the chances of a product to be sold are higher. A unsalable product usually exhibit a low quality/price due to either a low quality or price too high, or both causes simultaneously.

Quality is the best argument to sell, although the price is often a deciding factor. Quality as fitness for purpose of a product, seen in time, are by far the most important measures for customer satisfaction.

Of course, for the Romanian consumer very important is products price, which is why they often choose the product with the lowest price, regardless of its quality.

Romanian food satisfy both quality requirements prescribed in standards and in European regulations, for which their quality is the same, if not superior to other imported products.

Each countries have lower or higher level of food quality. Romanian market try to keep quality of food on a higher level to satisfy its consumer, to ensure the security and safety of consumer.

Imported products have often a lower quality, but, because of a lower price, the consumer choose these products.

Its important to know all aspects of quality and all factors that can influence it to choose the correct food.

In Figure no 1 we can see all aspects of food quality, all aspects that can influence it and consumer choose.

Romanian market offer a wide range of products in all forms of quality. All of us can choose products according with our preferences and wishes, the budget we have, with our demands, to the quality that we want.

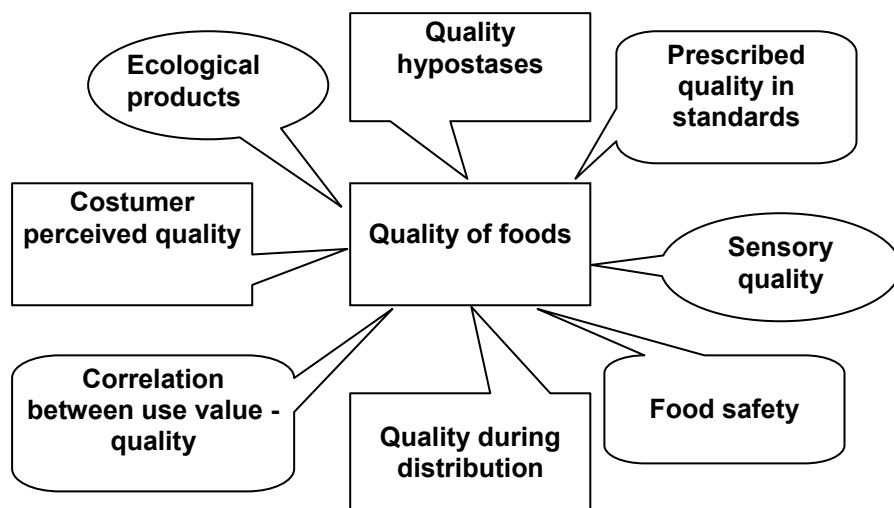


Figure 1. Aspects of food quality

2. Definition of quality products

Special increasing of quality's importance was due mainly of increased competition, continuously increasing of demands of customers and society, the increasing complexity of products and processes for their preparation. Defining quality is of paramount importance. Quality affects labor productivity and prices in general economic performance of firms.

Etymologically, the word derives from the Latin as "QUALITAS" which means way of being. On the origin the concept there are several points of view expressed by national and international bodies. Disciplines as philosophy, economics and technical give different meaning of the term.

The accepted definition of quality, in terms of economic, is given in standard ISO 9000: 2008 quality as "the extent to which a whole of intrinsic characteristics meet the requirements". According to this definition, quality is not expressed by a single feature, but by a set of characteristics; quality is not independent, it exists in relation to requirements. For the purpose standard, the term "quality" can be attributed adjectives such as "poor", "good" or "excellent" and the term "intrinsic" in opposition to the "attribute"

means something that exists as a permanent feature.

3. The hypostases of quality

Quality, with a complex and dynamic character to be regarded as a technical-economic category with specific manifestations and possibilities of transforming the operational elements, facilitating communication between economic agents.

Quality is found throughout the production logistics and movement of products in various hypostases specific of each phase of product circulation, incorporating differentiation of content and implications for economic activity. These "facets" of quality reflects how they are perceived and translated the requirements of beneficiaries on product quality during the technical-economic circuit of goods, starting from the preliminary specification, continuing with design and manufacture, ending with meeting these requirements in use of the product to the customer.

In practice of relationships between providers and beneficiaries, meet, usually following facets of quality of goods: designed quality, approved quality, prescribed quality, contracted quality, delivered quality and real quality (SR EN ISO 9000:2008) as result in figure 2.

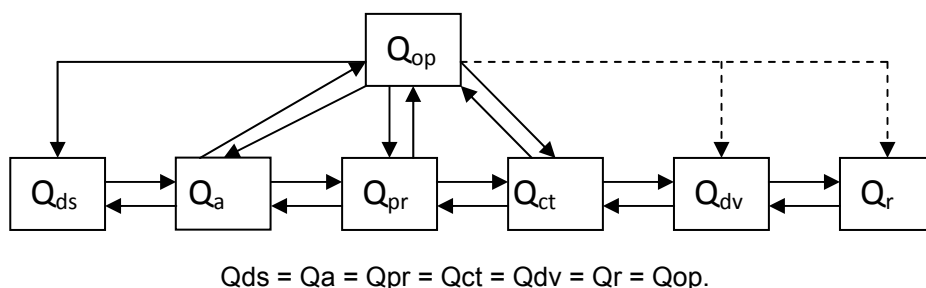


Figure 2. The correlation between quality hypostases

Source: Processing after SR EN ISO 9000:2008

The hypostases of quality, in terms of supplier and recipient, highlight certain characteristics, which expresses the main interests of producers and traders in the market.

Most products are not consumed where it is produced. Between production and consumption there are a number of operations (packing, loading, shipping, transportation, unloading, storage, etc.) that make on the products and can influence often negative, the quality of the lot. Also, even if is compliance the conditions for carrying out these operations, the quality may change due to the lability of the chemical composition of the product. s a result are highlights two facets of quality, namely static quality respectively real quality of the lot, determined at a time and dynamic quality respectively evolution in time of quality product batch. The practical importance of dynamic quality resulting from its implications in a number of activities such as contracting in determining the amount of quality features and delivery schedules; in establishment of validity and perishability as well as in implementation of corrective measures for organizing the transport, storage and preservation of consignments of goods.

In practice of commercial activities the economic agents will meet frequently with these facets of quality, having to operate with them in contractual relations.

4. The quality prescribed in standards

We know that all foods must comply with the conditions prescribed in standrds. Quality standards have become one of the most important barriers for goods exported products to developed countries. The standards purpose is to ensuring worker safety, consumer health protection, environmental protection, cost reduction through standardization.

Standards and technical regulations become technical barriers to trade if they are different from one country to another or if they are not recognized in other countries. As a result, the foreign market is narrower or wider, the access is cheaper or more expensive, depending on the barriers of this nature. Ways to overcome barriers arising from the existence of different standards in these countries are either to establish common standards or to promote mutual recognition of standards.

Food's standards describes essential intrinsic characteristics of food and the minimum and maximum values in which must be fit the main characteristics.

The main properties are described in the standards:

- the sensory properties (appearance, sectional aspect, taste, odor, color, consistency etc.)
- physico - chemical properties (moisture, fat, density, acidity, minerals, metals etc)
- microbiological properties (yeasts, molds, salmonella, staph, etc..)

- admitted additives (nitrites, nitrates, salt, water etc..)

Romanian food are strictly controlled in terms of correspondence with quality standards, the safety and security of consumers, which causes consumers to choose these products on the market and they prefer it not the imported food.

5. Sensory quality

Of all the aspects of quality, sensory quality is by far the most important. The first consumer contact with food is such as sensory. So sensory characteristics of food plays a very important role in consumer reaction to acceptance or rejection of food.

The elements composing the food sensory side are the feedstock (the quality of raw material is reflected in the quality of the finished product, E's - food additives); manufacturing technology (compliance phase of the technological process of the formulation); the state of aggregation (gas, liquid, solid, semi-solid); form (the default package, attractive shapes to suggest quality products); color (psychological effect, loss of original color - low quality, often products that have different color than what we are used to, are not successful in the market - Pepsi Blue, yellow ketchup etc.); the clarity (soft and alcoholic drinks - determine the freshness of their, highlights certain diseases and defects); aroma (bouquet) (are critical in the buying process); taste (depending on your preference, health status, etc.).

Complaints due to lower sensory quality, poorly expressed or improper food are born, usually the first contact with the product, which can be:

- visual - The consumer observe a non-specific shape of a product, the non-attractiveness of the packaging, unsuitable color for a particular assortment, packaging material incompatibility with the product, haze of alcoholic and soft drinks etc.;

- tactile - through the touch, the consumer finds the lack of firmness to fresh fruits and vegetables, brittle nature

of the core and its lack of elasticity in the case of bread;

- olfactory - sometimes the consumer is able to test the nature of the food and the flavors contained, on this basis, to ascertain the state of freshness, such as coffee, tea or different confectionery;

Taste - the primary sense that consumers retain all the nuances of the four basic tastes and combinations thereof, specific tastes, pleasant, attractive, inviting, and cases that deviate from the normal foreign tastes, unpleasant, repulsive.

Sensory properties of the products have major implications on consumer behavior and they may, as I said, stimulate or inhibit consumption. The impact of this category of properties on the quality of products is very important, while being difficult to eliminate the subjectivity of assessing these dimensions of quality goods.

Although sometimes Romanian food (especially vegetables and fruits) are inferior in terms of the appearance of imported products, they are preferred by consumers because of the lack of additives, chemical fertilizers and harmful substances. Due to insufficient funding sources often farmers are forced to use natural fertilizers for crops grown, in fact beneficial for consumers. The taste and flavor of these products is superior. Although chemical fertilizers go to obtain food products showy, with a large period of preservation and storage, however, they can endanger the health of consumers.

6. Food security - food quality condition

Food safety is linked to the presence of food-borne hazards in food at the time of consumption. Since these dangers can occur at any stage of the food chain, adequate control throughout the product circuit is impetuous necessary.

Food safety has become a necessity impetuous of current society, for which became the center of the food universe. If until now, the main concern of producers

was only consumer needs, we are now in a position to say that, more important than this, the concern is meeting their needs safely.

Since 1 January 2007, the date of accession of Romania to European Union, it was necessary to align units of food industry to hygiene and safety requirements imposed by the EU.

European consumers and, therefore, the Romanian want safe and healthy food. The main concern of the European Union is to ensure that the foods are all the same level of standards for all its citizens, whether food is produced within the EU or imported. Food safety is a top priority for the EU. The regulations were strengthened and tightened from 2000 and to date in order to ensure that food consumed by Europeans are very safe.

Food safety begins, as Europeans say, from farm to fork. This new approach is more integrated: feed and food are pursued with great care, from the farm and continues until the product reaches the consumer's plate.

However, this certainly does not mean, however, uniformity (because it must meet the same requirements and the same rules). European law protects traditional foods and products in certain geographical areas, providing consumers with information to help them to distinguish them from fakes.

Occur, but new systems to ensure that food security as well as warning systems and consumer information

relating to products presenting a risk to consumer safety.

Romania has aligned fairly quickly and well to EU requirements regarding food safety. Food products in Romania shall ensure traceability at all stages, so all unsafe consumer products can be removed from the market in a timely manner.

7. Quality during distribution

Food quality is a dynamic trait, a fact that change over time due to certain factors of influence that can be modified positively for food (such as fruits and vegetables) when storage conditions are controlled and directed or it can damage when transport conditions, storage and warehousing and distribution are not met.

Factors that may affect food quality during technical - economical circuit we can group into three categories: factors influencing food preservation by keeping meaning the product passing through each link the physical circuit; factors which is due to food transport and factors drivers influence on food quality during commercialization.

Regardless of the stage of the technical - economic in which are foods (figure no. 3), they are in a continuous process of storage. Because of this, must always control the process and intervened to keep the product quality characteristics, so that the processes and changes that may occur in food does not affect its quality.

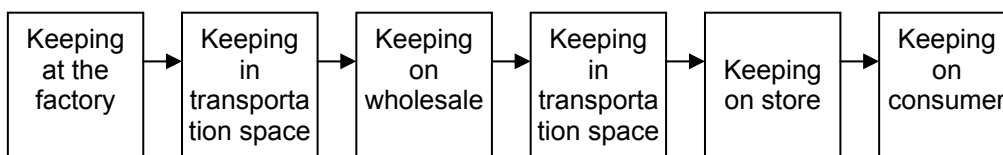


Figure 3. Technial – economic circulation of products

Source: Sperdea, N., *Quality of Food in the Frame of Technical Economical Circuit*, Universitaria Publisher, Craiova, 2010

Keeping food depends on a number of factors influence both internal and external, process in which may occur physical changes, chemical, biochemical

implications more or less intense on their quality. These factors should be kept in a balance in order to achieve the optimum

storage of the products for a longer period of time.

It is known that each food has specific conditions of storage and keeping, conditions on temperature, air humidity, air circulation, chemical composition of atmospheric air. Any oscillation of values specified may lead to changes in food, physical, chemical, biochemical and microbiological changes. Maintaining the optimum product in storage and management involves controlling the size of atmospheric parameters - temperature, composition and velocity of air, according to standardized provisions.

All Romanian food have inscripted on the label validity period together with storage conditions and storage set by manufacturers.

8. Correlation between use value - quality of food

The complex of functions of a product make the use value of the product, its usefulness. Thus, the utility of a product is given by the real or alleged ability of a good to satisfy a human need by using his time on the physical, chemical, sensory, which are intrinsic characteristics of food. All these properties useful function configures a product, the real usefulness.

The other features, the extrinsic, such as product image, consumer behavior, etc., determines expected utility, as they are purely human considerations, personal or group characterized by bias.

Value in use, as evidenced by the above, is the synthesis properties (characteristics) that pursuing compliance with requirements, pre-formulated expectations. But any good will also present the properties that are undesirable, inappropriate specifications, ie deficiencies of such good quality.

The whole complex of properties of a food, its features and shortcomings and inconsistencies in requirements, make quality product. Depending on these foods can fit in various classes, as it complies with the specifications.

Food properties are, as I said, prescribed in standards, any negative deviation from the values of which can make the product unusable.

Food functions are rooted in the use value (consumption) itself, is a manifestation of it; role of food in the feeding and health status of the population is achieved through a wide range of functions that occur on several levels and interrelated structure, chemical composition and properties of the product.

As food functions were determined to be: nutritive, plastic, energy, catalytic, protection and sanogenesis, therapeutic, sensory and aesthetic, hygienic-sanitary and symbolic function, all of which are directly related to product quality.

9. Quality perceived by customer

Romanians, perhaps more than any other nationalities, perceive food quality differently. Prolonged economic crisis, lack of financial resources, very low consumer information Romanian, led to the formation of unhealthy consumption habits. We note some specific features of the Romanian food purchase:

- purchase of food depends largely their price, not necessarily the quality or price - quality ratio
- appearance and taste matters a lot
- prefer imported foods that are cheaper and more showy
- believes that romanian food quality is superior to the imported food
- believe that romanian foods are healthier

10. Conclusions

Romanian food can successfully compete with any other imported products on the market. Compliance with product standards, European regulations on food security and food innocuousness, traditional agriculture, leading to obtain quality food.

Although consumers are interested by product prices, autochthonous food quality as well as certainty of consumption of safe products for health, causes

consumers to choose Romanian products.

Of course, the market is flooded with imported products, like those Romanian products, but with lower prices. Only a small proportion of consumers will choose those products, namely those with low income and poorly informed. The remaining consumers will not be sacrificing quality in favor of price.

Romanian food quality is guaranteed by analysis bulletin, certificates of quality and quality assurance provided by the manufacturers. Of course that sometimes there are deviations from the prescribed quality and guaranteed, but these are isolated cases, often discovered by the National Authority for Consumer Protection and the Health Authority Veterinary and Food Safety.

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