

ANALYSIS OF FOOD PRODUCTS CERTIFIED UNDER QUALITY SCHEMES ACROSS THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract

The work aims to analyze the implementation of food products certified under quality schemes across the European Union from 1996 to 2024. The information obtained from the study of "eAmbrosia" database were analysed, processed and synthesized. The data entered and processed in this study aimed the entire period for which records exist (1996-2024). The aims of the research being: to identify the frequency of PGI, PDO and TSG certification; to compare the use of quality schemes according to the EU countries; to compare the use of certifications according to product classes; to compare the use of quality schemes across the EU countries according to product classes. The analysis of the share of products registered with each of the three quality schemes reveals that the majority are PGI registered (52.88%), followed by PDO products (42.70%) and TSG registered products at just 4.41%. In conclusion, the work provide a series of recommendations aimed at improving the current situation at both the European and national levels.

Key words: quality schemes, PDO, PGI, TSG

INTRODUCTION

To ensure the quality and safety of food products, the European Commission has established a comprehensive policy that includes various measures and instruments, such as: certification on quality schemes known as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin), PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) and TSG (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed) - tools that guarantee the authenticity of the products; The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) - a key tool to ensure the flow of information to enabling swift reaction when risks to public health are detected in the food chain; Administrative Assistance and Cooperation Network (AAC) - allows authorities to share information with or request support from the authorities responsible for the same matter (e.g. veterinary controls) in another Member State, including carrying

out investigations into business operators of that Member State, successfully used within the European feed and food legal framework [1]. Managing these quality schemes at European level is ensured by specific regulations whose implementation is monitored by the designated authorities [2-5].

The European Union (EU) aims to assure a high level of food safety and animal & plant health within the EU through coherent farm-to-fork measures and adequate monitoring, while ensuring an effective internal market. Moreover, consumers increasingly pay attention to the contribution made by farming on sustainability, climate change, food security and development, biodiversity, animal welfare, and water scarcity.

To help producers maximize the added value of their products and to enhance

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consumer choices, the EU introduced a quality labeling system in 1992, which includes PDO, PGI, and TSG; this system aims to safeguard the names of these products [6-7]. Rooted in a rich history of regional and traditional specialties, particularly in southern European countries [8], these labels create a unique identity for food products by highlighting the characteristics of their region of origin, thus providing added value [5]. The PDO, PGI, and TSG labels are designed to offer consumers clear information about the origin or special qualities of products, empowering them to make informed purchasing decisions [9-10].

Food quality labels are intended to promote and safeguard food products, serving as a guarantee of quality, geographical origin, specific characteristics, and production methods. These labels provide legal protection against imitation in the marketplace, helping to prevent consumer deception by non-genuine, potentially inferior products. They also enable producers to achieve a premium price for their authentic offerings and aim to deliver clearer information to consumers about product attributes, making it easier to identify food items with certified quality [11].

The protection granted to the geographical indications at international level is considerably improved by the TRIPS Agreement (The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights), an international legal agreement between all the member nations of the World Trade Organization (WTO); it establishes minimum standards for the regulation by national governments of different forms of intellectual property (IP) as applied to nationals of other WTO member nations [12].

This study seeks to analyze the implementation of food products certified under quality schemes across the European Union from 1996 to 2024. It will examine the types of products included in quality

schemes and assess the interest of both producers and authorities in European Union countries regarding this approach.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The information obtained from the study of "eAmbrosia" database were analysed, processed and synthesized. eAmbrosia is a legal register that is administered by the European Commission, Directorate for Quality Policies, of the names of agricultural products, wine, and spirit drinks that are registered and protected across the EU [13]. It provides a direct access to information on all registered geographical indications, including the legal instruments of protection and product specifications. It also displays key dates and links for applications and publications before the geographical indications are registered.

The data entered and processed in this study aimed the entire period for which records exist (1996-2024). We have established the country of origin, the type of certification and the product class as analysis criteria, the aims of the research being: to identify the frequency of PGI, PDO and TSG certification; to compare the use of quality schemes according to the EU countries; to compare the use of certifications according to product classes; to compare the use of quality schemes across the EU countries according to product classes; the analysis addresses also the status of implementation of these schemes at European and national level according to specific legislation. The data were organized, combined, compared, and ranked, and then presented in various tables and graphs. Results were expressed in both absolute and relative values to facilitate easier comparison, analysis, and interpretation.

The data interpretation included an analysis of the factors hindering the implementation of European quality systems, along with an overview of the various actions encompassed by the EU's Integrated Food Safety Policy. They

resulted in conclusions and recommendations for both entrepreneurs and the relevant institutions and authorities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As of September 30, 2024, the research outcomes indicate that 1575 product items certified with PGI, PDO, or TSG are registered in the eAmbrosia database; in table 1 is detailed the products registered by EU countries.

Table 1 The products certified under quality schemes across the European Union

Country	PDO	PGI	TSG	Total (%)
1. Austria	11	6	3	1.27
2. Belgium	4	14	2	1.27
3. Bulgaria	3	2	7	0.76
4. Croatia*	24	26	1	3.24
5. Cyprus	2	11	0	0.83
6. Czechia***	6	24	5	2.22
7. Denmark	0	8	0	0.51
8. Estonia	0	1	0	0.06
9. Finland	5	4	3	0.76
10. France**	112	160	3	17.46
11. Germany	12	85	0	6.16
12. Greece	81	38	0	7.56
13. Hungary	9	24	2	2.22
14. Ireland	4	6	0	0.63
15. Italy	174	150	4	20.83
16. Latvia	1	3	3	0.44
17. Lithuania*	1	7	2	0.63
18. Luxembourg	2	0	0	0.13
19. Malta	0	0	0	0.00
20. Netherlands	6	6	4	1.02
21. Poland*	10	26	11	2.98
22. Portugal	68	81	2	9.59
23. Romania	1	11	2	0.89
24. Slovakia***	3	12	7	1.40
25. Slovenia*	12	13	4	1.84
26. Spain**	110	106	2	13.84
27. Sweden	11	11	1	1.46
Total	672	835	68	100.00

*4 PDO are registered for Croatia and Slovenia; 1 PDO is registered for Lithuania and Poland

**2 PGI are registered for Spain and France; 1 PGI is registered for Netherlands and Belgium

***4 TSG are registered for Czechia and Slovakia

The study shows that in the EU, 26 states have at least one product registered under one of the quality schemes, the total registrations up to date (on September 2024) being of 1575 products; Malta has no registered product.

The first place, with the most products registered under the European quality schemes is Italy (328 products, of which, 174 PDO, 150 PGI and 4 TSG), followed by France (with 275 products, of which 112 DOP, 160 PGI and 3 TSG) and Spain (with

218 items, of which 110 PDO, 106 PGI, and 2 TSG); the fourth and fifth places are Portugal (with 151 registered products, of which 68 PDO, 81 PGI and two TSG) and Greece (with 119 registered products, of which 81 PDO and 38 PGI). The countries

on the last positions are Ireland (10 registered products), Denmark (8 products registered), Latvia (7 products), Luxembourg (2 products) and Estonia which occupies the last position with only one product certified under quality schemes.

Table 2 Status of product names registered as PDO, PGI and TSG by to product classes ($n = 1575$, in %)

Product class	PDO	PGI	TSG	Total
1.1. Fresh meat	2.82	7.94	0.19	10.95
1.2. Meat products (cooked, salted, smoked, etc.)	2.37	9.92	1.22	13.51
1.3. Cheeses	12.16	3.52	0.45	16.13
1.4. Other products of animal origin (eggs, honey, etc.)	2.82	0.96	0.26	4.03
1.5. Oils and fats	7.94	1.79	0.06	9.80
1.6. Fruit, vegetables and cereals fresh or processed	10.44	16.97	0.13	27.53
1.7. Fresh fish, molluscs, and crustaceans and products derived therefrom	1.15	2.05	0.32	3.52
1.8. Other products of Annex I (spices, condiments, ciders, etc.)	1.92	1.15	0.26	3.33
Total – Product class 1	41.61	44.30	2.88	88.80
2.1. Prepared meals	0.00	0.00	0.19	0.19
2.2. Beers (valid also for TSG)	0.00	1.28	0.19	1.47
2.3. Chocolate and derived products	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.06
2.4. Bread, pastry, cakes and other bakery products	0.26	5.83	1.02	7.11
2.5. Pasta	0.00	0.77	0.13	0.90
2.6. Salt	0.38	0.32	0.00	0.70
2.7. Natural gums and resins	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.13
2.8. Mustard paste	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.13
2.9. Hay	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.06
2.10. Essential oils	0.19	0.13	0.00	0.32
2.11. Aerated waters	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2.12. Cochineal (raw product of animal origin)	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.06
2.13 Flowers and ornamental plants	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.06
2.12. Cork	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total – Product class 2	1.09	8.58	1.54	11.20
Total	42.70	52.88	4.41	100.00

Of the 14 products registered by Romania, 11 designations are registered PGI ("Magiun de Prune Topoloveni"; "Salam de Sibiu"; "Novac afumat din Țara Bârsei"; "Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată"; "Cârnați de Pleșcoi"; "Telemea de Sibiu"; "Cașcaval de Săveni"; "Salată cu icre de știucă de Tulcea"; "Plăcintă dobrogeană"; "Pită de Pecica"; "Salinate de Turda"), one designation PDO ("Telemea de Ibănești") and two products TSG ("Salată tradițională cu icre de crap"; "Sardeluță marinată"). It is also important to mention that Romania has

filed applications for PGI registration for the products: "Batog deltaic de sturion" on 21/07/2023, "Babic de Buzău" on 22/09/2023 and "Cârnați din topor din Vâlcea" on 11/06/2024.

The analysis of the share of products registered with each of the three quality schemes reveals that the majority are PGI registered (52.88%), followed by PDO products (42.70%), TSG registered products trailing at just 4.41%.

The food products seeking registration fall into specific classes of products

established by the European Commission for quality schemes.

Table 2 shows the status of products registered as PDO, PGI and TSG by product class. As it is presented, a dominant product class for PGI is the class "Fruit, vegetables and cereals fresh or processed" (16.97 %), followed and "Meat products" (9.92 %) and "Fresh meat" (7.94%). The highest number of products for PDO is registered in the "Cheeses" class (12.16%), also in the class "Fruits, vegetables and cereals fresh or processed" (10.44 %) followed by "Oils and fats" class (7.94%). TSG is the most typical in the product class "Meat products" (1.22 %) and further in the product class "Bread, pastry, cakes and other bakery products" (1.02 %). The most common product class for PDO, PGI and TSG is "Fruit, vegetables and cereals fresh or processed", which includes 27.53 % of all registered products.

Regarding products registered by Romania, Lapusneanu et al. (2019) [14] carried out a study on analyzing the guarantee of quality and safety of food products, and this was among the countries with the fewest registered products occupying the penultimate place, with 5 products; in our study, in 2024 year, there is an increase in the number of products registered by Romania, which shows that producers have begun to understand the benefits of product certification.

CONCLUSIONS

Since 1992 when quality schemes were created until now, interest for them continuously increased, also for producers and for consumers. However, an aspect that should be improved would refer to the registration procedure, which is prolonged sometimes too much. For example, the Romanian products registration procedure has been carried out in some cases over a period of approximately four years: for "Cașcaval de Săveni" product, the registration process started with date of

application, 27/04/2017 and ended with date of registration, 22/04/2021; for "Cârnați de Pleșcoi" product, date of application was 04/07/2016 and date of registration was 04/10/2019.

Regarding TSG, these results indicate that this quality scheme is not sufficiently appealing to producers. To enhance its attractiveness, efforts should be made to simplify the procedures, reduce the registration timeframe, and implement additional measures to stimulate producer interest.

The PDO, PGI and TSG schemes bring benefits to consumers as well as to producers; consumers are assured they are buying a genuine product with specific value-adding qualities and producers benefits lie in fair competition, protection, and promotion of their products. To take full advantage of these benefits, producers should promote their products with the value-adding attributes and highlight the specific character of their products to consumers in aim of the be to build awareness and credibility of the quality and distinctiveness of PDO, PGI and TSG products.

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