

STUDY REGARDING THE CONSUMER PROTECTION FIELD OF OF AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

MARIN DIANA¹, PETROMAN CORNELIA¹, CIOLAC RAMONA¹, IOSIM IASMINA¹,
VADUVA LOREDANA¹, DINCU ANA MARIANA¹

¹*University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timisoara,
Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Timisoara, Romania*

*Corresponding author's e-mail: dianamarin@usvt.ro

Abstract: *International bodies for consumer protection have a special role in the defense of consumer rights. Restricting the area of protection only to agro-food consumption, it aims at the following objectives: improving the nutrition of the population, both quantitatively and qualitatively, supervising the quality of food offered to consumers through the market, defending against aggressive sales policies and promotion of the products practiced by some suppliers and better information to consumers regarding the agri-food products launched on the market. At the European level, we find several non-governmental bodies that have an extremely important role in consumer protection, among which we mention the European Office of the Consumer Union, the Committee of Family Organizations of European Consumers, the European International Institute of Consumers, etc.*

Key words: *consumer protection, agri-food products, Europa*

INTRODUCTION

The consumer represents two different categories of consume entities, namely: the individual consumer and the organizational consumer [7,9,13]. The first category acquires goods and services for its own use, for use in the household, for a certain member of the family or in order to give gifts to other people [1,5]. The second category, meaning organizational consumers, are commercial companies, institutions that buy products, respectively purchase raw materials and consumables as well as some services in order to achieve their own object of activity [2,8].

Regardless of the research plan approached, in order to carry out a rigorous study of consumption, reference is inevitably made to another concept, the one of the consumers, because in practice, consumers are the agents of consumption, so in a broad sense, through the consumer we mean any person who consumes goods that are the result of a productive process [3,12].

Analyzing from the point of view of economic theory, the consumer is associated with non-productive consumption, being able to be considered a user of goods and services. From a legislative point of view, the consumer is defined as follows: "the natural person who acquires, uses or consumes, as the final recipient, products obtained from economic agents or who benefits from the services provided by them" [4,6,14]. The text of the law excludes cases of collective consumption specific to organizations such as children's homes or old people's homes, which means that these communities, although organized in the form of a legal entity, are still included in the category of consumers [10,15].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to determine the characteristics of agri-food consumer protection field at European level, we undertook studies to analyse the international bodies that operate in this field, the specific objectives of agri-food consumer protection field, the establishment of information intended for the consumer of this type of products.

RESEARCH RESULTS

International organizations for consumer protection have a special role in the defence of consumer rights, in 1960, the International Organization of Consumer Unions was founded, as an international organization that represents and supports consumer organizations from all over the world. Organized as a non-profit foundation, it currently represents the interests of 180 organizations from seventy countries.

The support of this organization is manifested in three directions (figure 1.):

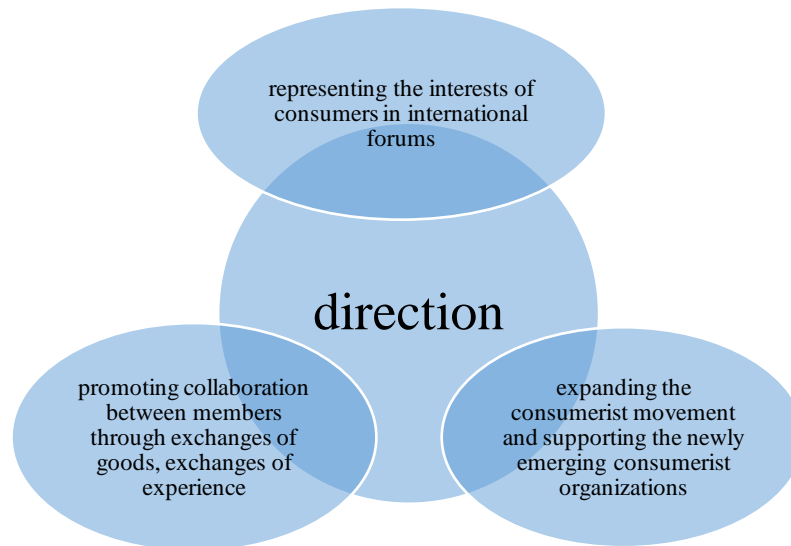


Figure 1. Support directions of the International Organization of Consumer Unions

At the European level, the following non-governmental bodies operate with a role in consumer protection:

- European Office of the Consumers' Union (BEUC);
- Committee of Family Organizations of European Consumers (COFCE);
- European Community of Consumer Cooperatives (EORUCOOP);
- European Confederation of Trade Unions (CES);
- European International Institute of Consumers (EHC).

International community, through its highest forum, the United Nations, considered it necessary to discuss with its structures, the issue referring to consumer protection, adopting, through Resolution no. 39/248, on April 8, 1985, "Guiding principles for consumer protection". They are intended to provide governments of all countries with a framework that can be used to collaborate and strengthen consumer protection policy and legislation. Seen from such a point of view, the main objectives on which it is necessary to focus on each country, through its governmental and non-governmental bodies, must mainly pursue the following aspects:

- facilitating the production and distribution of products corresponding to the needs and requirements of consumers;
- ensuring the control, through all national and international organizations, of abusive commercial practices that affect consumers;
- promoting international cooperation in the field of consumer protection;
- encouraging the development of market conditions that provide consumers with a wide range of products and at favorable prices for them;
- consumer protection against dangers affecting their safety and health;
- ensuring consumers' access to correct information, allowing them to make a choice according to their personal wishes or needs;

- creation of a consumer education system;
- taking into account, in developing consumer protection policies, the positive potential of educational and research institutions, public or private;
- ensuring the freedom of consumers, as well as of other representative groups or associations, to organize and appoint their leaders, to express their opinions in decision-making processes and represent their interests.

The development and application of the consumer protection policy in the European Union represented a gradual process, carried out in accordance with the dynamics of the internal market, accelerated after the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986. The increasingly diverse range of agri-food products offered on the expanded market and the anti-competitive practices for some producers and traders, they often created damages for consumers and the impossibility of defending their interests in an environment where trade transparency was insufficient. Over the years, the member countries of the European Community have introduced their own rules in their national legislation to satisfy the requirements of domestic consumers.

The process of economic integration of the European Union member states includes the need to protect consumers on this enlarged market, through various measures, such as: the development of national regulations on the safety and quality of goods offered to consumers, public control over the methods of setting prices and of commodity tariffs, regulation of commercial practices, sales methods, information on the characteristics of the products offered on the market, on the labeling and packaging of the products.

The policy of the European Union regarding the promotion of consumer interests must contribute to achieving a high level of consumer protection, through protection measures of health and safety of consumers, to promote their economic interests, to increase education and to ensure adequate consumer information, measures that lead to the hearing and real representation of consumers' interests, that provide effective access to legislation and justice for consumers, including individual and collective compensation mechanisms.

The consumer policy must be considered an independent component, within the social protection policies promoted by any state: with its own objectives, priorities and instruments, well integrated with other state policies. Consumer protection represents a set of provisions regarding public or private initiative, intended to ensure and continuously improve the respect of consumer interests. Consumer protection has been talked about since ancient times, the development of the exchange of goods was not a random and uncontrolled phenomenon. In the old writings from the time of Pericles it was said that in the markets of Athens there were inspectors, called *agoranomii*, whose mission was to evaluate and control the quality and uniformity of the bread, the weight and freshness of the fish, as well as the freshness of the vegetables and fruits offered for sale.

Along with the progress of the integration of national markets and the consolidation of the single internal market, the need arose for the European institutions empowered to ensure a high and uniform level of protection for consumers of agri-food products on a community scale, especially through legal instruments and action programs aimed at harmonizing the conditions and requirements within the European Union and to give a fair position to market participants. As an important aspect of the social policy that a democratic society must promote and as a basic component of social protection programs, consumer protection represents a set of regulations regarding public and private initiative aimed at ensuring and continuously improving the observance of consumer rights.

Restricting the area of protection only to agro-food consumption, it aims at the following objectives:

- improving the nutrition of the population, both quantitatively and qualitatively;

- supervision of the quality of food offered to consumers through the market;
- defence against aggressive policies of sale and promotion of products practiced by some bidders;
- better informing consumers about the agri-food products launched on the market.



Figure 2. Objectives of agri-food consumer protection field

Market transparency, as one of the operating conditions, implies good information of the consumer as a potential buyer. Such a condition can be frequently evaded or limited by various methods, corresponding to monopolistic interests or various oligopolistic agreements. As a result, in the contemporary world of the market economy, informing consumers is one of the basic objectives of social protection programs.

The experience accumulated in this field allows a delimitation of information complex designed for the consumer, in four large categories of elements:

1. information on the products present in the market - a category of elements through which they are made known to consumers: the nature of the product, its price, its origin, provenance, expiration date, packaging systems and data on the nature and composition of the packaging, systems of storage and conservation, etc.;

2. information on the market - referring, in particular, to the system of relations existing within the market, the intermediaries involved, the systems and levels of prices practiced, the types of services provided, the facilities that can be obtained in the field of acquisition, services and prices;

3. information about the distribution circuits - they look at the way in which the public can effectively, within the market, address the units that provide them with the best quality-price ratio. They refer to the structure of the economic circuits that concern the flow of each product category, the existing product network, the location of the units and the operating schedule;

4. information on one's own needs - a category of information whose objective is to clarify the consumer public in connection with the scientific way of interpreting, understanding and satisfying one's own dietary needs, both in terms of their quantitative and qualitative aspects.

CONCLUSION

Consumer demands began not only to grow, but also to express themselves freely through the increasing complexity of Romanian society and through the wide contact of the population of our country with the realities of Western civilization. These sets of activities must be structured starting from the philosophy of ensuring a harmonious human development, by applying policies to protect consumers against the incidence of dangers that may affect their health, safety or economic and social well-being.

Market transparency, as one of the operating conditions of the market mechanism, implies good information to the consumer, in his capacity as a potential buyer. Such a condition can be frequently limited by various methods, corresponding to monopolistic interests or various oligopolistic agreements.

BIBLIOGRAFIE

- [1]. **ASKAM T., NEBBIA PAOLISA**, 2004, EU consumer law, Editure Oxford University Press
- [2]. **CĂTOIU I., TEODORESCU N.**, 2004, Comportamentul consumatorului, Editura Uranus, București
- [3]. **DEL I. HAWKINS, ROGER J. BEST, KENNETH A. CONEY**, 2016, Consumer Behavior: Implications for Marketing Strategy
- [4]. **DIEGO MAXIMILIANO MACALL, CLAIRE WILLIAMS, SAVANNAH GLEIM, STUART J. SMYTH**, 2021, Canadian consumer opinions regarding food purchase decisions, Journal of Agriculture and Food Research, 3
- [5]. **DIMA D.**, (coord.), 2006, Mărfuri alimentare și securitatea consumatorului, Editura Economică, București
- [6]. **GAVRILESCU D., GIUCA D.**, 2000, Economie agroalimentară, Editura Expert, București
- [7]. **QUELCH J.**, 2016, Consumers corporations and public health, Editure Oxford University Press
- [8]. **MALIMI K.E., LADISLAUS K.M., GRACE M.N., ELIFATIO T., CYPRIANA C.** 2018, Acceptability assessment of ugali made from blends of high quality cassava flour and cereal flours in the lake zone, Tanzania, Asian Food Sci. J, 2(11)
- [9]. **MARIN DIANA**, 2015, Research Regarding the Purchase Decision Process of Consumer of Food Products, Scientific Papers: Animal Science and Biotechnologies, 48(1), 328-332
- [10]. **PETROMAN CORNELIA, PETROMAN I., MARIN DIANA, GABRIS DELIA RAMONA, CIOLAC RAMONA, VĂDUVA LOREDANA**, 2013, Consumption of Food in Quantitative Terms on Average of Origin, Scientific Papers: Animal Science and Biotechnologies, 46 (1), 382-384
- [11]. **RADOSAVLJEVIĆ MILICA**, 2010, Cereals – Production, Properties And Organic Food, Journal on Processing and Energy in Agriculture 14, 3,131-134
- [12]. **SIN C.**, 2004, Organisme modificate genetic, Seminarul „Rolul instituțiilor europene în monitorizarea eliberării deliberate în mediu a organismelor modificate genetic”, Ministerul Integrării Europene
- [13]. **SOLOMON M.**, 2004, Consumer Behavior: Buying Having and Being, Prentice Hall
- [14]. **TACKER THOMAS**, 2019, Rethinking consumer protection: Escaping death by regulation, Editura Lexington Books
- [15]. **WILKIE W.L.**, 1990, Consumer Behavior 2nd Edition, John Wiley & Sons, New York