

1. European Regions facing the global market

The agro food world market is characterized by a progressive trade integration. The global market progress consents to economize, it offers a widening range of food productions, and major continuity in supplies, yet it appears to be unstoppable, and sometimes irreversible, and dangerous.

The capacity of facing such dangers “as a team” together with our different territories is essential: globalisation bases on a progressive trade deregulation, that does not correspond to a precise management strategy. On the contrary, our citizens-consumers contemporarily take advantage and suffer from this process without being able to influence the market evolution: the scarce individual incisiveness becomes but decisive on the collective level (market reactions following today great food fears – BSE, chicken flu). Global emotional phenomenon teach the importance for the attentive consumer of relying on compact, organised, granted, and believable local production systems.

As far as the OGM question is concerned, our aim is also that of not taking a false step before having attentively evaluated costs and benefits of changing such an important rule for our future and that of our children. We trouble ourselves chasing food regulation in order to grant the consumer’s health, while it would be enough to pay one simple attention: not to deviate, but to invest on control systems to avoid damages. However, the damage caused in these cases is terribly superior to any economic benefit, often enjoyed only by a few people: how much was it possible to save using meat flours for feeding the oxen or cutting the costs of veterinary services against the social damage, the sanitary expenses, and the pulling down of big part of the bovine zoo technical property in Great Britain?

Such mistakes cannot be repeated. All of us are aiming at finding out local development solutions able to coexist harmoniously and to integrate in order to carry out the big European food supply.

2. The importance of the territorial identity

Europe has an unbelievable property of cultures, styles of life, knowledge, traditions characterizing each of our regions. Food products are an important piece of this culture, result of a history and of an intellectual and manual ability which cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it is sufficient to look on supermarket shelves to notice the proliferation of food products, named and dressed as one out of thousands of our recipes, but too often made with non original raw materials or using unknown techniques. These products use, the more and more, images, forms, and colours or typical territorial elements taking, therefore, automatic possession of the great attraction power of the territory.

In front of such a situation, our goal becomes the promotion of authentic products, and the preservation of the true cultural identity value.

3. The European history: a food history

The history of Europe is a history of food: from the classic Greek, Hellenic and Roman culture we learn the use of the three sacred aliments - bread, olive oil, and wine - and from the first age of continental Europe we derive the breeding tradition as well as the pork transformation. The combination of these raw aliments, filtered through the meeting up and overlapping of different cultures, has produced an exceptional richness of diversity, today aimed at having good and tasty food on the table, but usually born to satisfy primary needs.

Our food culture originates from the survival capacity of entire generations of our ancestors, whom we are thankful for the extraordinary ability of inventing and of transmitting us solid and durable roots.

Most recent history, after the second world war, has known a sudden acceleration, and an unexpected transformation: the Mediterranean diet (an American invention) has helped us to save at least our nutritional style, even though a great deal of our regional cookery risked and risks to be swept away by the wind of globalization.

Thus, it is necessary to reflect on the evolution of consumption, and on the capacity of directing the market.

4. The consumption style pilots the market

Which are our consumer's needs? What is he looking for in the food product? Which values do drive him towards his daily choices?

The price is undoubtedly the first key of this choice, nevertheless recent history has imposed a new value hierarchy to the market.

1) Safety

The consumers usually look for assurance forms minimizing the potential risks for their own health: they prefer organic and/or "controlled" food and typical alimentary products (considered as being more natural, safe and traceable). They are more expert as well as more wary than in the past paying rising attention to the product information.

2) Wellbeing

Some aliments are bad for the health, others help to fight certain pathologies: the consumers look for newest health promises that differ according to cultures, and local regulations. This search is also pushed on by the elderly population increase as well as by the prolongation of life expectation.

3) Functionality

To control one's own body, appearance, vitality through the diet is an increasing expectation among consumers: to take care of the weight without giving up the pleasure of eating compromising one's own balance.

4) *Pleasure*

To eat is first of all a question of pleasure, a pleasure obtained also through the selection of quality food. Today, consumers prefer high quality aliments, whose production process is meticulous and the ingredients are carefully selected, etc.

5) *Cosmopolitism*

The pleasure of the exotic discovery of unknown tastes, and of new sensations is a tendency expressing itself in different ways according to places and times. Looking for new differences, the consumer looks for higher quality specialties.

6) *Sensation varieties*

The pleasure is the differentiation in regard to daily life, the research of aliments playing on the polisensory character of the individual: taste, colour, form, consistency.

7) *Tradition*

The tradition is source of rediscovery, pleasure for the consumer, and proof of competence and quality: it is the research of one's own roots, the discovery of less known specialties, belonging of the individual heritage.

8) *Preparation easiness and brevity*

Today the consumer reckons the service as a duty. Its convenience expectation concerns all the phases of the product lifecycle: transportation, storage, preparation, consumption. The major use easiness the major satisfaction.

9) *Solution food*

The development of nomadic behaviours, the destructuring of meals, the research of time earning drive the consumers towards the research of specific aliments, suited for each consumption occasion: breakfast, lunch, dinner, home, work, and/or car snack, etc. choosing among the different and proper values (pleasure, form, convenience, etc.).

10) *Public spirit*

Is the need of the producer or the retailer to be reassured about its good conduct within the society: part of the aliment prices are given to charitable or social associations. This is a new form of generosity or consumer's egoism, who refuses all that negatively affects its eating pleasure.

11) *Environment value and ecology*

The communication campaigns in favour of both the environmental respect and the selective waste disposal push the consumer to be demanding towards the producers. A new moral value is born, able to become as important to the consumer as taste, safety, convenience.

These are eleven key elements/features characterizing modern consumption in the western world: values being special incentives in order to promote our food products.

5. The main consumers' role

The consumers request a major assurance level on food products traceability, and on their cultivation and transformation techniques. The quality assurance systems and those assuring the intrinsic features of food products contribute to a growing confidence in the integrity, and in the origins of aliments through the guarantee of safeguarding: cultivation techniques standard, typical crops features, transformation and conservation processes, ethical behaviour, etc. The same systems play an important role in the protection of potential traceability of food products during their transfer from one alimentary chain to another.

On the basis of the European Commission orientations, there are a great deal of initiatives addressed to guarantee the quality in the agro food sector. The BSE case quickened their rising and diffusion all over the nation, and so did the need to fulfil new law obligations introduced as guarantee of food products traceability.

The majority of these initiatives is intended to pledge safety and traceability of food products, while others offer specific quality assurances linked, for example, to the procedures of organic cultivation. The diffusion of these initiatives is backed up by the guiding role of food products distribution companies, very busy and involved in the definition of process and products standard.

6. Food products valorisation: common means, different courses

There are 5 instruments made available by the EU to the producers: 3 quality labels (PDO, PGI, and VQPRD for wines), a specificity label not referring to the origin (TSG), and a method of production (organic). Their value consists in standardizing the concept of guarantee for the European consumers: it is highly unlikely to use them for all the great existing number of regional food specialties. Not all of them may become European designations for regulations and procedure complications, economic dimensions of production systems, guarantee cost, heterogeneity of quality contents to be guaranteed.

Thus, an important goal for our regional policy could be the identification of flexible, cheap, and efficient instruments in order to assure an effective defence to our products.

7. The great theme: the origin

Among the several values to be protected, the first and most irreplaceable one is the place in which an aliment is made. Within this issue the quality is defined, also a non material one, that makes that aliment something original, and sometimes unique: the origin of the product is information.

We all need to work to help the consumer know correctly where the food he buys comes from, because he himself is asking.

8. The food specialties heritage

With the increasing demand for typical aliments, and of the relative purchase rate, the supply increases, too, even though the sector operators show a most moderate and rational interest, both because the incidence of typical products consumption on the whole volume of alimentary consumptions is still relatively low, and the production volumes are necessarily limited. It would be absolutely unwise to trigger a sector growth crisis.

The certification of product typicality guarantees its tradition and informs the consumer on the territorial origin, assuring in some way the production traceability. In marketing terms, this certification confers an exceptional image value and contributes to the creation of new market outlets highlighting the territorial perception, and the important quality connotations, authenticity, traceability, formally guaranteed by the obtained recognition label.

On the other hand, the demand of organic food, fresh and/or transformed, keeps less steady and predictable growth rate for the high price difference in relation to non organic productions, the scarce producers attention towards the promotional information on the label, the lack of trained personnel as well as of well-furnished shops.

9. The OGM threat

In this context, the OGM mine risks to explode: a technical element which could destroy forever a laboriously achieved balance. Indeed, OGM

- cancel all in a sudden our historical evolution heritage;
- undo the territorial identity;
- raw aliments could allow the production of false, but cheaper typical products increasing their still very dangerous imitative capacity;
- productions fatally drives away from our fields and cattlesheds species, varieties and races on which we have built our diet and our culture.

10. Traceability: goal or instrument?

Traceability is a necessary instrument, compulsory or voluntary, in order to manage food safety. It is universally considered as basis of alimentary quality development and basic requirement for the consumer's protection as it includes in its meaning the functional connection of the different links client/supplier of the food chain through recording, controlling and knowing of data related to the flows (quantity, quality and time).

This concept is shared by administrations, operators, consumers, and markets, yet the debate is still open: how to make the traceability? Which are the elements to be recorded, elaborated, and transmitted as information to the consumer?

One more bar code on the aliment packaging could be useful to manage an emergency or to trace a batch of products detrimental to health, but it doesn't give more information to the consumer. Today's danger is that of setting off an useful instrument, known only by a few people, and therefore losing the bet of an important growth of our market in terms of a major transparency.

11. Regions role and local administrations duties

In this scenery, the role of European regions is decisive: it's a sector policy role; an institutional role as arbiter between different and sometimes conflicting boosts; a promotional role of a food range, but also of a real alimentary culture; a role in which the consumer's protection is preeminent.

It is up to the local administrations to work together with the companies in order to guarantee a good level of truthfulness and transparency of information.

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