

IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN STANDARDS IN AGRITOURIST FARMS

N. ȚANE¹ W. THIERHEIMER¹

Abstract: *The paper presents some possibilities to optimize the activity in agritourist farms, by increasing both the quality of processing and the quality management. It analyses the theoretical and practical conception of the notion of quality as well as the possibilities of adaptation to the small farm necessities.*

Key words: *food quality, agritourist farm, quality management.*

1. Generalities Regarding the Quality of Agricultural Food Products in Romania

Within the context of the general transformations that occurred in Romania after 1989, numerous changes also occurred in the agricultural food sector, with considerable economical and social effects. The agricultural reorganization, the modification of legislative settings and the change of ownership forms had repercussions on the evolution of agricultural food production, as well as on its marketing.

Agriculture has remained an important sector of Romania's economy, representing 16...17% of GDP.

Although just after the Revolution it recorded certain recoil, starting with 2001 we noticed an increase in the agricultural and food production. For example, the growth in agricultural food production in 2004 as compared to 2000 is as follows: milk and dairy products 95%, meat products 21%, fresh and tinned vegetable products 20%, juice and non-alcoholic beverages 17%, edible oil 4%, sugar and sugary products 1%.

The social and economic conjuncture of the latest years favored a decrease in the

purchasing power of the population, because of decreases in real income as well as changes in relative product prices that influenced the request of food products, with repercussions on the consumption models. Thus, on one hand, we noticed a decrease in the consumption of animal products in favor of vegetable products, and, on the other hand, we noticed an entailment effect between different types of products. Unfortunately, the product quality is not always correlated to the price on the Romanian market, and the social-economical conditions in Romania, in the transition period, allowed the easy promotion, on the national market, of a large volume of low or average quality products, with apparently accessible prices, attractive for consumers with low income. This evolution of the national agricultural food market was also influenced by the following factors:

- insufficient control of the food production and marketing;
- insufficient consumer protection;
- low consumer exigency.

The quality of food products was affected by the quality decrease of raw material, by processing mode, by post-

¹ Dept. of Engineering and Management in Tourism, *Transilvania University of Braşov.*

processing operations, as well as by consumer behavior.

The quality of agricultural food materials was negatively influenced by non-compliance or inadequate application of agronomical knowledge in cultivating plants and raising animals [1].

The intensive industrialization of agricultural food materials positively influenced product durability and diversifying product range (starting from the same raw materials), but, in many cases, negatively influenced nutrient quality (biological value) and number of processed materials. On the other hand, utilizing some physically and morally used production capacities often led to obtaining low efficiency in production, high costs and obtaining non-competitive products. Producing and marketing foods in inadequate locations and non-compliance of sanitary rules had repercussions on food safety. Not respecting the post-processing conditions (transport, storage etc.) led to a premature degradation of products still in shelf life. Production and dissolution of foods was insufficient and inefficient in many situations.

Utilizing some agricultural food materials of lower quality and applying aggressive technological strategies led to obtaining food products of low quality, but also lower prices, attractive for most consumers. The decrease in purchasing possibilities determined consumers with low income to opt for cheap foods, regardless of provenience, food safety and quality. For some economic agents, marketing expired or counterfeit products became a regular practice. This is why, in order to promote quality products, it is important to also intensify consumer awareness and education. To develop the Romanian agricultural food market and to integrate it successfully in the unique European market, it is necessary for the Romanian food industry to become

functional and competitive, in compliance with European and international standards.

The competitive environment that already exists in some areas of activity in the food industry proved the necessity to redefine quality, as an attribute of food products, in the new economical environment. Food products do not represent solely the products themselves anymore, but also include services. On the other hand, with a limited physical consumption of products, the costs to obtain food products can increase only by processing and post-processing operations.

This is why, in order to maintain or increase market influence, many companies in the food industry began to be preoccupied by ensuring quality management, the quality approach being headed not only towards products and processes, but also towards costs and consumers/clients [2].

Within the context of Romanian integration in the European Union, in the last years the food legislature was constantly modified, Romania fully accepting the policy of community quality, regarding standardization, control and quality insurance of food products.

2. Perspectives of Introducing Quality Concepts in Romanian Agritourist Farms

The legislation stipulates that units in the food branch must identify decisive activities for food safety and must guarantee that corresponding safety procedures are established, implemented, maintained and revised, based on principles utilized in the system of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP).

The HACCP concept systematizes all base stipulations of sanitary inspection, proving to be a simple and efficient method of realizing control and self-control in terms of food product hygiene.

HACCP is recommended worldwide, and also by the European and Romanian legislations, being a universal method. This system, together with other food quality control methods like GHP (Good Hygiene Practices) and GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices), provides the correct procedures and methods to ensure the safety of foods, and together with a quality management system (ISO 9001), ensures the efficient management of food product safety. Implementing a safety management system represents a systematic approach to prevent producing unsafe foods. Integrated certification means production units are safe and guarantees their beneficiaries that the production system will always provide quality products, so that they obtain what they want, when they want, and at the agreed price.

The HACCP system has an important role in obtaining and marketing food products safe for the human health, declaring its practical advantages in utilizing them in food service, food industry, tourism and commerce.

This is the moment for professionals in the tourism industry to understand the new tendencies in international tourism development, and to realize that the increasing customer expectations force them to resort to new management and marketing instruments. From the consumer's point of view, tourism can be for leisure - even the tourism that is intersected by the public domain (event or conference tourism) or for work purposes.

From the perspective of the persons collecting the money, tourism is an economic activity, subject to its rigors: satisfying consumer requests and obtaining profit. From an economical point of view, the human being has two essential dimensions: producer and consumer, each of whom having its own characteristics and rules. From the rules that govern consumer behavior, realizing the consuming act of

the optimal quality/price ratio, goods or services of high quality, at a low cost constantly stands out.

In the functional market economy, due to the increasing competition, product or service suppliers are constrained to take into account, when it comes to diversity, quality and price, of the needs, demands and expectations of their customers/consumers, because these clients are getting better informed, more demanding, and they prefer more frequently to purchase products and services of maximum quality at a minimum price. As a consequence, both the managers as well as employees of agritourist farms should have the interest of offering only high quality products at minimal prices, in order to maintain their clients and maybe gain new ones, with the purpose of continuing to increase their business figures, profit and market share. To commercialize quality products and services, company managers and employees should want, afford and know to constantly realize, evaluate and improve product quality.

An important aspect in realizing these objectives is to organize the agritourist farms in the spirit of ecology, from the points of view of foods producing and processing, as well as tourism services organization and management [3].

Farms specialized in growing ecologically pure products do not use during production, processing and storage a number of different agents that might negatively influence the finished products. In the case of field crops, the soil must correspond to ecological rules, with at least 12 months before obtaining the ecological harvest. Soil fertilization is performed only with accepted organic or mineral products: compost, stable garbage, manure must, organic waste, straws and other vegetable materials, sawdust, peat, as well as rock dust, chlorate calcium (CaCl), natural minerals, ameliorated lime, natural phosphates, magnesium sulphate, microelements.

In preparing the compost, they use dry plants (leaves, lumber) in a quantity of at least 25% of the volume. The fertilization, assouilment and cultivation technique is made to minimize the migration of soil nitrogen and to reduce the content of nitrates in vegetables. The peat will be utilized for no more than 75% of the volume. It is not permitted to cover the soil with sheets during crop cultivation, because it blocks the penetration of sunbeams and oxygen.

The soil and its substrata can be disinfected with fumes and then processed with compost liquid extracts.

The harvesting and processing in high quality conditions is obtained by choosing efficient harvesting, processing and storage methods of agricultural products.

Although in the growth of trees there are limited possibilities, we must use all available measures of mixed cultures, green spaces, intermediary cultures and soil protection. In the already existing meadows, it is necessary to create a certain harmony between plants. The soil in meadows must not remain uncovered the whole year.

It is recommended to grow secondary grass, and to introduce fertilizers for every individual tree (approx. 90 kg active substances / ha).

The caring and protection of tree cultures is made taking into consideration the special conditions of tree culture, as well as introducing those methods that increase plant resistance and stop the development of certain diseases.

3. Implementing the Quality Management System in Agritourist Farms

The main preoccupation of every agritourist farm has to be the quality of its products and services. To reach their objectives, the farms have to organize themselves so that the technical, administrative and human factors that influence the product and services quality

should follow their course according to the requirements of European standards.

In order for the organizations to function with efficacy, they must identify and lead numerous correlated processes that interact with each other. Many times, exiting a process will mean directly entering the next process.

The process approach is a term that means applying a process system inside an organization, together with identifying these processes, their interaction and management (Figure 1).

A quality management system has two interdependent aspects: necessities and interests of society (reaching and maintaining quality at an optimum financial effort), as well as necessities and expectations of clients (incarnated in their trust in society's capacity to supply the required quality).

According to European standards, there are eight principles for quality management at all levels:

- Orientation towards client (which refers to understanding the client's expectations for products and services, a balanced approach of their needs and expectations, knowing these needs and expectations in all the range of activity, measuring client satisfaction, as well as managing the relationship with the client)

Direct involvement of the administration in quality management (by accepting the role of process owner and the responsibilities regarding problem solving);

- Approaching the quality management as a process;

- Leading the system by process approach;

- Continued process improvement;

- Factual approach of the decision-making process (collecting information in the conditions of accuracy, reliability and accessibility of data and information, their analysis, as well as making decisions and applying measures based on the logical analysis results, combined with experience and intuition) [4];

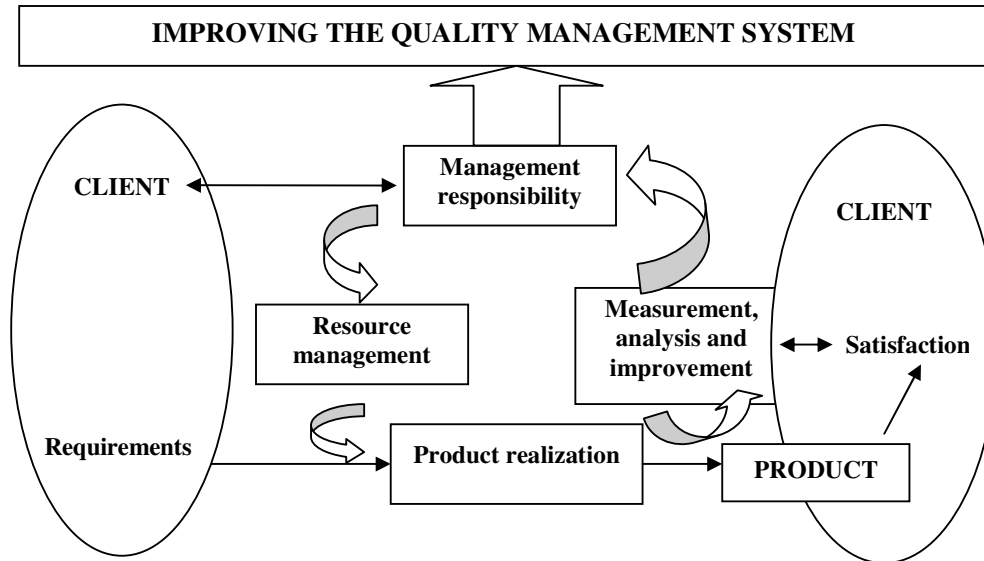


Fig. 1. *Block scheme of a quality management system based on processes*

- Partnership rapport with the suppliers; The quality management system approach can be done either horizontally or vertically.

The vertical approach is aimed at penetrating the barriers between hierarchical levels (vertical communication). Realizing this type of approach is done based on managerial processes (strategic planning, continuous measurement and improvement of processes), and consists of:

- Identifying internal requests;
- Elaborating the policy regarding the satisfaction of internal requirements and procedures that ensure their application;
- Elaborating the general objectives regarding the quality, and procedures to ensure reaching this quality;
- Detaching the objectives specific to functional units and hierarchical levels from general objectives. The objectives will be connected with those from the superior hierarchical level, being constituted in an objective system.

The vertical approach of the quality management process contributes to the good cooperation, maintaining under control, and

improvement of the realization processes' capacity.

The horizontal approach is aimed at penetrating the barriers between functions and compartments (horizontal, trans-functional communication), conferring a systematic character to the policy implementation and attaining the objectives. This approach consists of:

- Identifying external requests (client, settlements);
- Identifying and documenting the necessary processes to reach the managerial and technical objectives;
- Ensuring control over processes by stabilizing, measuring, monitoring the performance indicators and the specific parameters.

4. Conclusions

Bringing the agricultural food production to the quality standards proposed at a European level seems an impossible process, especially in the area of mountain agriculture and agritourism, in a relatively

short period of time. To be able to realize this task, it is necessary to adapt a specific quality management system, as well as its implementation in agritourist farms.

Creating the adequate organizational structure has to be accompanied by the dissemination of modern concepts regarding quality standards.

References

1. Chirovici, E.: *Introducing the Quality Concepts and Instruments in Romanian Hotel Services, Q Mark - Model of Good Practices to Implement and Certify the Quality of Hotel Services in Romania*. In: Quality Tribune **3** (2004), p. 29-31.
2. Drăguleanu, N.: *Quality of Services in Tourism, Introducing the Quality Concepts and Instruments in Romanian Hotel Services, Q Mark - Model of Good Practices to Implement and Certify the Quality of Hotel Services in Romania*. In: Quality Tribune **3** (2004), p. 42.
3. Dumitraşcu, F.: *Quality of Management According to New Standards*. In: Q Academia, Module 2, Theme No. 1, Bucureşti, 2002.
4. Teodoru, T.: *Implementing the Quality Management System*. In: Quality Tribune **9** (2001), p. 24.