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Food Quality Certification: Is the Label Rouge Program Applicable to the U.S.?

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Abstract

Label Rouge is a complementary commercial branding popular in France that guarantees high quality of products recognized by 80% of the French consumers. The label is driven by consumer preferences which are highly influenced by French culture and tradition. Label Rouge is mainly known for its association with the best quality poultry meat since 1965. This program involves all aspects of production from genetic breeders and farmers to processing plants where every part of production is controlled and must follow the Label Rouge requirements.

In the U.S., poultry production greatly increased throughout the 1980s and 1990s due to Americans' changing lifestyle (EPA, 2009). Consumers became more health conscious and sought more convenient food items. This led to the increased commercialization of poultry production which is now mostly a vertically integrated industry.

The vertically integrated nature of poultry production gives the application of the Label Rouge system a lot of potential for the U.S. poultry industry. However, the issue of consumer acceptability and overall applicability in the U.S. is still in question. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the Label Rouge poultry system in France and its relevance in the U.S. poultry industry.

The novel relationship of consumer preferences to the label makes it challenging for the Label Rouge program to be applicable in the U.S.; American consumers do not have as distinct tastes and preferences similar to French consumers driving the demand for this type of poultry meat. However, the system of quality assurance to consumers has great potential. Demand for traceability and food safety is intensifying; therefore configuring the poultry sector into a system similar to Label Rouge is very prospective. In France, consumers prefer it over the organic label due to cheaper prices while the difference in quality is judged insignificant. In addition, there is no industry-wide label known in the U.S. that assures product quality, thus the niche market concept

for Label Rouge could be adopted after the specifications are adjusted to fit U.S. consumer tastes and preferences. A very important consideration is the economic trade-off inherent in this level of certification. The balance between supply and demand must be sustained while the process moves towards a stable, sustainable, and a fully traceable system. This transformation faces a long progression toward market acceptance.

Keywords: product quality certification, Label Rouge, poultry industry, vertical integration, traceability
