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# REGIONAL PRODUCTS AND TRADITIONAL AND ORGANIC FOOD: COEXISTENCE OR COMPETITION?

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**Abstract.** Globalization leads to modernizing food habits and to an ever-growing substitution of traditional foods by industrialized foods in the diets of Europeans. The demand for traditional, regional and organic food is mainly driven by price and availability and by environmental awareness in the society. Polish consumers are increasingly turning to traditional and organic food, perceiving it as healthier, safer and tastier than commercial industrialized food. In the European Union, Protected Designation of Origin, Protected Geographical Indication, and Traditional Specialties Guaranteed are labels that have been promoting and protecting the names of agricultural products and foodstuffs since 1992. High prices are the main barrier to demand for traditional, regional and organic food. Hence, measures should be taken to promote the market for these products, including by protecting and promoting products and highlighting their high health and taste qualities.

**Keywords:** traditional food, organic food, regional food, protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, traditional specialties guaranteed

## INTRODUCTION

The most important contemporary trends in consumption include: ethnocentrism, consumerism, greening, dematerialization, nationalization, hybridization, virtualization, privatization, internationalization, and interest in transgenic food and traditional or regional food (Bigliardi and Galati, 2013; Lücke and Zangerl, 2014). Poland and other European Union countries continue to

witness growing interest from the consumers and producers in regional and traditional food with distinctive quality. The market is dominated by mass production food while regional and traditional food is a small segment of the market in most countries. Mass industrial products contain many chemical additives (improving the taste, smell and color) and preservatives prolonging the stability of food which is often transported over long distances (Sieczko, 2008; Żakowska and Kuc, 2009). While the presence of additional substances in food is acceptable, it decreases consumer confidence in products offered by food producers. Consumers prefer local and domestic food; they are looking for a healthier alternative such as organic and traditional food (Bryła, 2016).

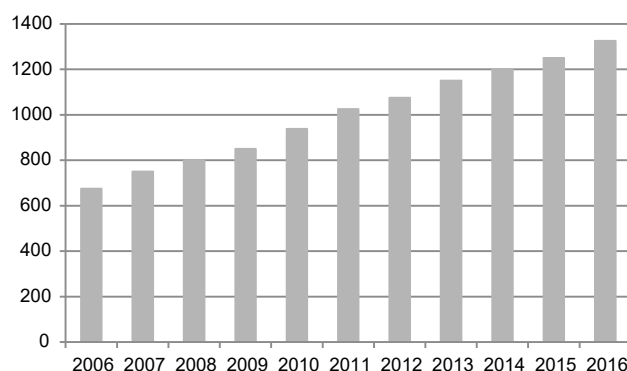
## REGIONAL AND TRADITIONAL FOOD

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the market for regional and traditional products in the European Union has been developed with particular care because this type of products is considered to be the cultural heritage of the entire continent (Costa et al., 2010; Kowalczyk-Vasilev et al., 2011). In the European Union, numerous activities are carried out under the Common Agricultural Policy to protect product names and places of origin. This includes guaranteeing the high quality and uniqueness of products, and introducing legal protection measures for the relevant production methods. Agricultural products and productive inputs, included

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in the law of the EU, which demonstrate high quality or exceptional characteristics and properties resulting from the use of traditional production methods (i.e. methods used for no less than 25 years), are defined as regional and traditional products. The characteristic feature of regional and traditional products is their specific quality. It results from a traditional production method consistent with culinary heritage, while also being driven by special climate, soil and other conditions of the production location (Komorowska, 2006; Kowalczyk-Vasilev et al., 2011; Kupracz, 2007; Stasiak, 2007). The growing consumer concern for food safety, combined with increased requirements for features and diversity of food products, promote the demand for original and healthy regional food. In addition, more and more Europeans become aware of the need to care for the cultural heritage of their native region with centuries of culinary tradition and original food production methods. The experience of older members of the European Union indicates that regional food products are a source of income not only for the producers but also for national budgets. Also, regional food products provide job opportunities for the local population who build their wealth upon nature and tradition (Grzybek and Kawa, 2010). Example include Italy, the leader of the regional and traditional product market. The protection and promotion system for regional and traditional products is a way to protect cultural heritage. Thus, it significantly contributes to increasing the attractiveness of rural areas and the development of agritourism and rural tourism (Stasiak, 2007). In Poland, after World War 2, Polish cuisine was tried to unify, including regional products (Sieczko, 2008; Czajkowska et al., 2013). However, Polish consumers are interested in domestic products, as reflected by numerous traditional and regional cuisine fairs where products considered to be traditional enjoy great interest. In almost every European country, national-level solutions are in place to control the functioning of the market for regional and traditional products. These activities consist in identifying and helping in the preparation of product specifications by producer groups, and stimulating and organizing production, sales promotion and control. Extensive support systems are in place. Examples include France where regional products (e.g. wine) have a significant share in the entire market for agricultural products. The French were the first in Europe to protect their products. Already in the early 1900s, France led to the general recognition of Geographical Indications, the

Name of Origin and the Certificate of Special Character of a Product. The EU system of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG) has been operating in the European Union since 1992 (Boyce, 2011; Cayot, 2007; Chudy and Gierałtowska, 2013; Fernández-Ferrína et al., 2018; Grzybek and Kawa, 2010; Kühne et al., 2010; Sorokowska et al., 2017). Currently, the system of protection and promotion of regional and traditional products in the European Union is based on Regulation (EU) No. 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of November 21, 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs. This regulation combines the solutions already provided for in Council Regulation (EC) No. 509/2006 of March 20, 2006 on agricultural products and foodstuffs as traditional specialties guaranteed and in Council Regulation (EC) No. 510/2006 of 20 March 2006 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs. Both regulations were repealed. The purpose of Regulation (EU) No. 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of November 21, 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs is to simplify and harmonize regulations and accelerate the registration procedures while maintaining the quality of registered products and providing protection for producers' and consumers' interests. Figure 1 presents the number of PDO and PGI registered foods in the EU in 2006–2016. The growing trend in the number of registered foodstuffs definitely confirms their attractiveness to producers and consumers.



**Fig. 1.** PDO and PGI registered foods in the EU in 2006–2016  
Source: European Commission, n.d.

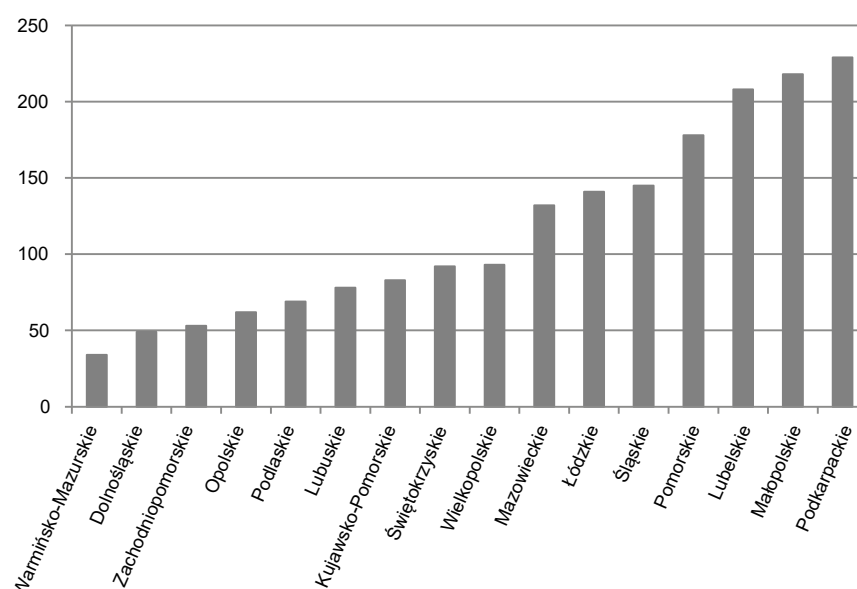
The Protected Designation of Origin means the name of the region or a specific location or, in exceptional cases, the name of the country. The product's quality or characteristics are mainly or exclusively related to this particular geographical environment and to its specific natural and human factors. The product should be manufactured, processed and prepared in that geographical area (Chudy and Gierałtowska, 2013; Fernández-Ferrina et al., 2018; Grzybek and Kawa, 2010; Hajdukiewicz, 2014; Kühne et al., 2010). If food or agricultural products are registered as Protected Geographical Indications, their name should indicate the name of the region, of a specific location or, in exceptional cases, the country of production. The product should have a unique specific quality, recipe and reputation, and may exhibit other features related to the geographical origin resulting from natural factors such as climate, landscape, fauna and flora, and production method and tradition (Brown and Paszkiewicz, 2017; Bryła, 2016; Hajdukiewicz, 2014; Lücke and Zangerl, 2014; Santeramo et al. 2018). The product must be manufactured, processed or prepared in a precisely defined geographical area. Only one of the three production phases (production, processing or preparation) must take place in the area concerned. An agricultural

product or foodstuff may be labeled Traditional Specialties Guaranteed if it has a characteristic (or set of characteristics) that make it stand apart from other products of the same category. The product name must express its unique nature reflected in the traditional composition (food raw materials) or production or processing method.

The list of Polish traditional products currently covers 1864 items (Fig. 2). The largest number of registered products comes from the Podkarpackie voivodeship (229 products) and the smallest from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship (34 products). The list mainly includes ready meals and dishes, bakery and confectionery products and meat products. "Other products" (e.g. spices), oils and fats and fish products are the smallest groups. Other highlighted categories are dairy products, vegetables and fruits, honey and beverages.

Examples of PDO, PGI and TSG-labeled Polish products and foodstuffs are shown in Table 1. Some products belong to two different categories.

Cheaper conventional products and low consumer incomes reduce the demand for traditional and regional products. Therefore, in order to develop the market for regional and traditional products, demand-boosting measures should be implemented (Grzybek and Kawa,



**Fig. 2.** Number of products included in the Traditional Products List (by voivodeship)  
Source: MRiRW, n.d.

**Table 1.** PDO, PGI and TSG-labeled Polish products and foodstuffs

Protected Designation of Origin	Protected Geographical Indication	Traditional Specialties Guaranteed
Silesian kołocz (cake)	Redykołki (cheese)	Kabanosy (dry smoked sausage)
Milicz carp	Heather honey from the Lower Silesian forests	Warsaw bean
St. Martin's croissant	Silesian kołocz (cake)	Pierekaczewnik (baking)
Trójniak (mead)	St. Martin's croissant	Suska sechłońska (dry smoked plum)
Kashubian strawberries		Orange agaric oil
Kiełbasa jałowcowa (sausage)	Cebularz lubelski (baking)	Kiełbasa myśliwska (sausage)
Andruty kaliskie (wafers)	Andruty kaliskie (wafers)	Ozorkowski cheese
Bryndza Podhalańska (cheese)		
Oscypek (sheep cheese)	Trójniak (mead)	Drahimski honey

Source: MRiRW, n.d.

2010). Products should be covered by regional promotion projects to emphasize the novelty, specific characteristics, high quality, healthiness and unique taste qualities. The market for traditional products is a niche governed by its own laws. The products are made according to traditional recipes and traditional manufacturing technologies, and are based on traditional raw materials. This means that measures which have an effect on cost reduction (such as the use of appliances, technology simplification, acceleration of certain phases, automation) are implemented to a limited extent. Also, these products are difficult to distribute and poorly available.

## ORGANIC FOOD

From 2004 to 2015, the size of the European organic food market doubled, reaching EUR 22.8 billion, which translates into retail sales of organic food worth EUR 35 per capita. Organic products are often perceived as being more environmentally friendly, more trustworthy, subject to stricter control, healthier and tastier than commercial food (Bryła, 2016). In recent years, Poland has experienced rapid development of organic food production, especially after the accession to the EU. The most important distinctive features of organic farming include: the exclusion of GMOs and chemicals from production and processing, and farm inspections for compliance with organic production criteria. Organic food is perceived by consumers as safe, healthy and highly nutritional (Kowalczyk-Vasilev et al., 2011).

According to a Grand View Research Inc. report, the value of the global market for organic food and beverages will reach USD 320.5 billion by 2025. The global market for organic food is dominated by fruits and vegetables which contribute ca. 40% to global organic food revenues (Hermaniuk, 2018). In Poland, compared to other European countries, much smaller volumes of organic food are purchased. One of the development barriers of the organic food market is the persistently low environmental awareness among the society and the lack of knowledge about the role and importance of organic food. High prices are an important aspect limiting the general availability of organic food to consumers. Organic foods are definitely more expensive than their non-organic counterparts. The reasons include the poor development of the domestic organic food processing sector, a high share of foreign products, and high margins on organic food (Cichocka and Grabiński, 2009; Komorowska, 2006; Kowalczyk-Vasilev et al., 2011; Sieczko, 2008; Stasiak, 2007; Zaborowska and Skierkowski, 2011). High consumption of organic food is particularly evident in highly developed European countries. The highest annual levels of organic food consumption per capita were recorded in Switzerland (EUR 177), Denmark (EUR 162), Luxembourg (EUR 134), Austria (EUR 127) and Liechtenstein (EUR 100) (Hermaniuk 2018). The lowest levels of organic food consumption in Europe can be observed in Central Eastern European countries, including Poland (EUR 7) (Przemysł Spożywczy, 2018). Despite the constant development and growth of organic food sales,

these products still have a relatively small share in the overall Polish food market.

In Poland, compared to other EU countries, there is a small number of organic farms, even though there are better opportunities for the development of organic production. According to estimations, ca. 500,000 hectares of land are currently used for organic farming. Poland has favorable natural conditions for the development of organic farming. The integration of Poland with the EU provides an opportunity to leverage the natural conditions for the development of organic production through commonly implemented programs to help farmers embark on the organic path. Organic farming means environmentally-friendly production activities (Brown and Paszkiewicz, 2017; Cichocka and Grabiński, 2009; Kowalczyk-Vasilev et al., 2011; Sieczko, 2008). In addition to delivering high-quality food products, it has a number of other important functions. It enables maintaining high fertility of soils, preserves natural landscape, helps protecting species in the production area and in neighboring areas, supports protection of groundwater, affects the environmental awareness among the society and prevents rural depopulation.

## CONCLUSIONS

On the one hand, today's consumers are inclined to follow global trends; on the other hand, they want to preserve the culinary heritage, which is reflected in their growing interest in traditional and regional food. Organic food is perceived by consumers in a very positive way; they believe in its special taste and nutritional values, which plays an extremely important role in determining their choices. Healthy lifestyle trends and growing awareness of consumers make them more and more enthusiastic about organic food (which may also be a regional or traditional product). Regional, traditional and organic products coexist in today's food market. However, the latter may be less popular with the consumers because of higher prices. The development of the organic food market will therefore depend on how fast does the society get richer.

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