SPECIFICITY ELEMENTS OF MARKETING ACTIVITY AT THE LEVEL OF AGRO-ALIMENTARY PRODUCTS PRODUCERS IN THE FRAME OF EUROPEAN UNION EXPANSION

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The information presented in this article constitute a part of the results of a direct research organized at the level of Bacău market whose purpose was knowing the main marketing specificity elements developed by the producers of agro-alimentary products, in the frame of European Union expansion. The presented information reflects the existing situation at the moment of the gathering of data, respectively May-June 2006.

Key words: agro-alimentary product, agro-alimentary marketing, agro-alimentary safety and security, quality.

During the year 2006 (respectively the months May-June) I organized a research with an exploratory character among the agro-alimentary products producers from Bacău whose main purpose was knowing the main specificity elements of marketing developed by them, in the frame of European Union expansion.

As research procedures I used: secondary data analysis and semistructured individual in-depth interview.

The selection collectivity was constituted from the totality of units producing agro-alimentary products that were developing their activity on the territory of Bacău County being investigated some of the representative firms on Bacău Market (and even national one), respectively: Agricola International S.A. Bacău; Aibac S.A. Bacău; Europrod S.A. Bacău; Conagra S.A. Bacău; Alimenta S.A. Bacău; Almera International S.R.L. Bacău; Pambac S.A. Bacău; Bere Lichior Mărgineni S.A. Bacău.

Processing and analysis of the data has been realized through content analysis, some of the research results being presented further on.

The main specificity element of marketing activity of the agro-alimentary products producers, during the period marked by European Union integration, is intensifying the efforts for a quality increase, assuring the alimentary safety and security of the population. This concern results, partially, from the necessity of adapting to continuous increase exigency of the consumers, but also from the necessity of adapting to EU legislation. One of the alignment efforts at the standards imposed by the EU is the implementation of the HACCP system.1 In most cases, during the interviews development, this issue has been dealt by the interviewed specialists with the higher frequency or was considered as the main aspect through which European Union integration influences firm’s activity, in general, marketing activity, in special. Hereby, in most enterprising where the research has been realized the HACCP system was to be implemented and attested (Pambac, Conagra, Alimenta) or it is in course of implementation and attesting (Agricola International, Aibac, Europrod, Almera International). Among the investigated enterprising, only Bere Lichior Mărgineni S.A. did not start, yet, implementation process of HACCP.

The concern for reliability increase the offer of products from society determining the investigated firms to realize efforts in order to obtain other certifications, respectively ISO 90012. Even though implementation and certification ISO 9001 are not compulsory, the reason for which the societies implemented this standard (Agricola International, Pambac), or, in other cases in course of implementation (Bere Lichior Mărgineni, Almera International, Europrod, Conagra) is constituted by the advantages that these are having in the commercial relationships, the fact that certification ISO 9001 constitutes, before and after European Union integration a proof of the fact that in the respective enterprising quality is statute as fundamental value.

In the some time, the preparation for integration in European Union signified and signifies at a large level efforts for modernization and retechnology with a view to obtain superior quality products in safety and security conditions (aspect that results also from the necessity of implementation of the HACCP system), adapted to the most various tastes and at the some measure the assurance of environment protection. In the given conditions the representative Romanian producers of agro-alimentary products for the national market are in the situation of adopting the conception of social marketing – long term satisfaction of consumers. At the level of all investigated societies it was adopted as solution the realizing of investments for performance installation.

1 According to HG 924/11 from August 2005, published in 804/05 from September 2005, concerning the approval of General rules for agro-alimentary products hygiene, all the enterprising from alimentary industry have the obligation of implementing HACCP (system of analysis risks and critical control points), starting with the 19th of October 2006. HACCP is a method of assuring the security of agro-alimentary products from the raw material until the product reaches the final consumer’s table. Conform to HG. 1198/2002, basis principles of HACCP are: “analysis of potential alimentary risks of an operation from the frame of an activity from a unit from agro-alimentary sector; the identification of the points from this operation where alimentary risks might occur; establishing the points considered as critical for alimentary security, named critical points; the identification and implementation of effective control procedures and monitorization in these points; recurrent revision and every time when occurs a modification in alimentary sector of analysis of alimentary risks, critical points and monitorization procedures”.

2 Management quality system - ISO 9001:2000, is a standard that foresees the requires for the management quality system, in such a way that organizations will assure products and services according to consumers’ requires.
acquisitions agreed by EU, modernizing of production capacities, installations for environment protection imposed by the implementation of ISO 14001 and in the same measure, that offers the possibility of realizing superior quality products in exceptional safety and security conditions.

Beyond the necessity of recognition by means of various systems of certification, agro-alimentary products quality constitutes a priority for all the firms that produce agro-alimentary products, in the frame of development of activities at the level of a concurricences market and more than this, in the frame of European Union integration.

All firms where the research took place adopted a strategy of assortment innovation, with the purpose of offering products that will rise to the increasing exigencies of the consumers. Agro-alimentary products producers are confronting with changing in consumers preferences, with an increased exigency, as a result of the Romanian consumers’ awareness of the importance of a healthy alimentation. In consequence, it can be seen that agro-alimentary products producers are addressing to a market with new products, superior qualitatively, with a high benefic potential for health. Actually, healthy alimentation is a characteristic of European consumption, Romanian producers through the new products that they offer, answering as well to Romanian consumers’ exigencies, and preparing in the some time to answer the requires from the European market. It is pointed out, thus, a sustained effort of agro-alimentary products producers in order to offer on the market products that should respond to Romanian consumers’ exigencies, respectively, products with a benefic potential for health: products processed according to technologies that reduce to minimum nutritive substances looses, nutritional products (with the addition of vitamins, minerals, alimentary fibers etc.).

For instance, strategy used by Agricola International concerning bird meat is increasing the weight of refrigerated products in the total of sales, in the detriment of deep-frozen products. This option answers, in this way, to the new preferences of consumers, for a healthier alimentation (by refrigerating procedure meat preserves to a great extent the initial properties, while deep-freezing determines bigger losses of biological value of the products). Answering to the some exigencies of consumers, Agricola International Bacau is the only enterprising of this type from the country that owns slaughterhouse that uses the quick freezing system and the one that is utilized with all refrigerating facilities for producing fresh meat, thus, the delivered meay does not contain any tenderness agents, and the refrigerating chain is strictly checked-out (element that makes the difference between their offer and the one of its competitors).

Alimenta society oriented, also, towards the realizing of some meat specialities that would preserve to a great extent the initial nutritive properties of the meat. For instance, at all the products it was pursued the reducing of the nitrates’ quantity from the finite product, and also, the concoction have a reduced content in additives, and the quantity of collagen vegetal protein is at the minimum limit (2%- according to legal settlements).

Aicbac society that records vegetal production activities as well as breeding and agro-alimentary products activities addresses to market with products whose nutritional properties are closer to the ecologic ones. Thus, the surveillance of the entire chain (from the agricultural production up to the alimentary product) is assured. In this integrated system a correct nutrition of animals is followed and the cultivated varieties are adapted to standards imposed by EU. Concerning the agro-alimentary production nitrates and assonants content of the products is adapted to EU requires being under the level imposed by EU, and the finite products do not contain preservers. The increase of production costs (with 3-5%) has been preferred only for obtaining high quality products.

Pambac society answer to a healthy alimentation requires with equilibrated products nutritionally speaking, products made of ingredients recommended for the assuring of a good health shape. Thus, a divers range of bred and bred specialities is realised, with alimentary fibres, with sesame, with Graham, with rye etc. all this being recognized for their benefic properties on human organism.

In the case of Almera society fabrication technology used takes into account destruction, in a reduced extent, of the micro-organisms form the product, also, preservers are not used, both with the purpose of saving the benefic potential for health properties of the products. The checking-up of the raw materials quality is realised on the basis of some contracts concluded with specific firms, the check of the raw materials properties being realised on field, in order to correspond qualitatively and from a microbiologic point of view.

Along the some line, Europrod society offers to consumers ready-made products of meat and vegetal ones (hamburgers, nuggets, meatballs, sausages), whose fabrication technology assures a decreased cholesterol content (in comparison with traditional recipes) and are also safety from a microbiological point of view.

In the some time with the worry for increasing the benefic potential for health of the products offered to the market, agro-alimentary products producers are interested in satisfying some necessities specific certain segments of persons. Hereby, most firms address to market with dietetic products.

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3 Environment management system – ISO 14001, is an international standard that specifies the requires that refer to an environment management system that allows an organization to formulate and to implement the policy and objectives according to legal requires and to requires to which the organization subscribes, as well as information concerning important impact upon environment.

4 Reducing nitrites quantities from the finite product is compulsory starting with the 1st of January 2007, according to the settlements imposed by EU, yet, society started earlier (the 1st of May 2006) alignment process to the sanitary-veterinary imposed standards.
For instance, Pambac society offers to consumers that suffer diverse affections, products such as: bred without salt (diabetes, renal affections, hypertension), hypoglycaemic bred (diabetes), as well as a whole range of bred and specialities addressed, mostly, to persons with digestive affections.

Orientation towards dietetic products is highlighted also in the case of milk producers: Aicbach and Almera (that offer yogurt, sour-cream, milk with a reduced quantity of fat) or meat producers: Conagra (addresses specially to children with dietetic meat specialities, boiled, with reduced content in fat).

In the adapting process to more and more heterogeneous exigencies imposed by an expansion market, agro-alimentary firms adopted a differencing strategy. Specific to markets that attained a superior level in their evolution, differentiated approach on market is a condition imposed by the level of development of agro-alimentary Romanian market, as well by the EU integration context. At this moment all the investigated firms are addressing differently to the ones with lower incomes and to those with medium or high incomes.

The adapting of the offer of products to different sectors of consumers’ exigencies does not aim only market’s segmentation on income criterion. Agro-alimentary production firms address differently to consumers and accordantly to their age, their culinary habits etc.

For instance, Conagra society produces chicken specialities adapted to children necessities (through taste, aspect, fabrication technology), but also products for adults. Europrod society addresses to those who are fasting, as well as to vegetarians with semi-processed vegetables based on Soya and vegetables: hamburger, croquettes, meatballs nuggets, sausages etc. Almera offers products for children adapted to their taste and necessities: Chocó-milk, desserts wit a high content in calcium.

What has been remarked is the fact that, both because of the increasing the standards of living, but also, probably, because in short time (from the moment of adhesion) the potential consumers’ weight with high incomes, the majority of the firms either launched, or had the intention of launching new products from premium category, or, according to the case, to reposition some products from the medium incomes segment to superior one.

Thus, Pambac society launched in 2005 flower from Grania brand. In the some time with launching this product, Pambac invested in 2005 48% from the total amounts allocated for promotion on flower market in order to increase the value of Grania label. In the next period, Bere Lichior Margineni follows a restrain in products range, at liquors category (addressed to ones with low incomes) and launching on the market of a new type of beer SuperPils, addressed to high incomes persons, assortment characterized by a superior quality of beer, as well as a special wrapper. Almera International has the intention of repositioning medium products through a better display, a wrapper that will assure a longer period of warranty, and in this way through a superior quality.

In the case of the firms that are already displaying premium or super-premium products, products’ qualitative improvement may regard psychological aspects. For instance, Almera society intents for the following year label image development on their products, by means of intense publicity and promotion activities. In the case of Agricola group of firms the strategic objective of the year 2006 is positioning Agricola Bacau as brand leader in categories, and for the year 2007 positioning as brand leader, aspect that involves a significant promotion effort concerning the label’s value.

As a result of manifestation, more evident, of Romanian consumers’ preferences for traditional alimentary products, the agro-alimentary products producing firms have adopted their offer to the new tendency. Thus, are being offered during a whole year or with the occasion of religious fests, alimentary products obtained according to traditional receipts. Products’ traditional character is suggested by their names, by advertisements’ messages content, by the information inscribed on the products’ wrapper, by the images presented on different promotional materials. For instance, Agricola International, Conagra and Alimenta societies are offering meet specialities from smoked meet realized according to traditional recipes, natural smoke being used, without synthetic staining. Traditional character suggestion of recipes used for products fabrication is realised, in a great extent, by means of products’ names: “Traditional”, “Rustic”, “Bucolic” etc. Alimenta society offers to consumers during religious celebration periods traditional products: mosaic salami (Christmas), haggis (Easter). Pambac society offers various bred specialities with traditional aspect: round twisted Transilvanian bred, bred in griddle etc., and on different products’ wrapper (wheat flower, corn flower) traditional recipes are presented. Along the some line, Almera society was the first to launch on Romanian market a new wrapper for its products (milk, yogurt, sour-cream), wrapper whose design reminds the traditional clay pots in which peasant used to keep the milk.

In the some time with offering products that are addressing to ones who prefer traditional products, agro-alimentary products producers are also offering products that are addressing to those who borrowed from culinary habits of other nations. Europrod offers to consumers croquettes and cordon bleu based on French recipes, schnitzels prepared according to Wien recipes, as well as hamburgers and nuggets based on American recipes, and Alimenta society offers various products based on Italian tradition.

Answering to convenience need in food preparation and in aliment purchase, agro-alimentary products producers firms are offering a various range of ready-made products or partially prepared, shortening at maximum the time spent by the consumers for food preparation. Europrod offers partially prepared products such as: hamburgers, meatballs, schnitzels, cordon bleu etc., which, in order to be consumed, have to be submitted to a short thermo treatment. Agricola International offers mixings of products, ideal for traditional week-end barbeque. Pambac society offers to consumers a various range of pastry products.
Aliments producers answered to the need of diverse alimentation, as well as a result of reducing the number of persons per household, of renouncing at traditional family dinners, by offering products in reduced dimensions. Milk producers (Aicbac, Almera) are offering self products in wrappers of different shapes and dimensions, from small buckets of few litters, until glasses of reduced dimensions. Agricola International offers products and mixings of products in casseroles of reduced sizes, enough to be served at one dinner, and Pambac society offers bred and bred specialities of dimensions starting with 50 grams up to 1 kilo.

Because these are some of the commune aspects drawn out from the interviews contents with specialists from the 8 investigated societies, we can draw the conclusion that one of the main elements specific to marketing activity developed by the agro-alimentary products producers in the frame of adhesion to European Union refers to:

− concern’s intensification of quality increase, assuring the security and safety of agro-alimentary products;
− concern’s intensification for environment protection and realizing investments for alignment to the standards imposed by EU at this level;
− realizing balanced agro-alimentary products from a nutritional point of view, with a high benefic potential for health, dietetics;
− realizing products according to traditional recipes;
− adapting to consumers’ need for convenience in food preparation and an offer of products partially/ready-made;
− adapting to consumers’ need of diversification the alimentation and offering products in various wrapping dimensions (up to quantities that can be served at only one dinner).

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