

# Consumer Attitudes/Preferences towards Traditional Food Products in Vojvodina

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The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is a province located in the northern part of the Republic of Serbia, known for its rich cultural heritage, diverse traditional food products, and culinary traditions. The multifarious traditional food of Vojvodina is influenced by different cultures and ethnic groups that have inhabited this region over the centuries, including Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, and others.

consumers' attitudes

traditional food products

Autonomous Province of Vojvodina market

## 1. Introduction

Traditional food products are a significant element of a region's culture, heritage, and identity [1][2][3][4][5]. These foods are often passed down through generations and reflect the customs and traditions of a particular community or country [3]. In recent years, with the rising awareness of healthy food and environmental concerns, consumers are becoming more interested in the authenticity, food origin, unique food traditions, quality, as well as environmental sustainability and economic impact on local economies [6][7]. Traditional food products are mainly created using natural, fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients that are rich in nutrients. They are processed in small-scale processing units using artisanal production methods. Traditional, time-consuming processes such as fermentation, aging, curing, or slow cooking contribute to the unique and recognizable characteristics and quality of traditional foods [8][9][10]. These food products are often perceived as healthier alternatives to heavily processed or mass-produced foods [3][11][12]. Furthermore, the consumption of traditional food products promotes a positive economic impact and economic sustainability at a local level by supporting small-scale farmers, artisans, and local businesses involved in their production [3][6][7].

The consumption of traditional food products is steadily increasing due to numerous reasons. On the one hand, consumers' growing interest in traditional food products is due to globalization, food industrialization, various food crises, and environmental concerns [13][14][15]. On the other hand, there is a growing consumer interest in products of regional or local origin that support local producers and the economic development of rural areas related to sustainability [16][17][18][19]. Furthermore, traditional food products are characterized by unique characteristics and quality, providing a sensorial experience that connects consumers to the cultural heritage, history, and identity of a specific region. They reflect locally sourced ingredients, local climate and geography, traditional production methods, know-how, and social customs [20]. In order to protect and promote authenticity and unique quality and to provide consumers with a decision-making tool, traditional food quality schemes, also known as traditional food

certifications or labels, have been introduced. These schemes control food through assessments, inspections, and compliance with specific criteria, ensuring that a product adheres to the predetermined standards and characteristics set by the brand owner [3][21][22][23]. EU quality schemes have the potential to alleviate uncertainty when it comes to food purchases, providing customers with confidence in the distinctiveness and nutritional attributes of certified food products [23].

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## 2. Consumer Attitudes and Preferences

Consumer attitudes and preferences towards traditional food products are of great importance to all entities in the food business chain, such as producers, businesses, and policymakers. These attitudes and preferences are influenced by numerous factors, such as health concerns, personal experiences, cultural habits, and environmental and eco-economic concerns.

The increasing consumption of traditional food products has been noticed in recent years due to consumers' rising awareness of healthy food and food quality. The growing interest in traditional food products can be explained by various food crises, food industrialization, globalization, and environmental concerns [3][11][12][13][14][15]. Furthermore, consumers are becoming more interested in products of local origin, unique characteristics, authenticity, high-quality food products obtained through traditional production methods, and food that influences environmental sustainability and economic development in local and rural areas [6][7][16][17][18][19][22]. Consumers are increasingly seeking products free from artificial additives, preservatives, and synthetic ingredients. This trend is driven by concerns about health and sustainability and a desire for greater transparency in food production processes.

## 3. Traditional Food Products

Traditional food products are consumed in specific regions and countries by multiple generations and represent an inalienable part of cultural heritage and identity [1][2][3][4][5]. These products are characterized by unique characteristics, nutritional value, and high quality due to numerous factors. First, traditional food products are made from local, natural, fresh, and seasonal ingredients rich in nutrients, without additives and artificial supplements [20], in small-scale processing units using traditional production methods and know-how. Traditional, time-consuming processes such as fermentation, aging, curing, and slow cooking contribute to the unique characteristics, recognizable quality, and sensorial experience of traditional food products [8][9][10]. Furthermore, the consumption of traditional food products promotes a positive impact on local businesses and economies, as well as promotes environmental sustainability [3][6][7].

## 4. Quality Schemes and Certification

Traditional food products are characterized by their authenticity, specific sensory properties, and unique quality [1][2][3][4][5][20]. In the process of protecting and promoting these characteristics, food quality schemes, also known as food certifications or labels, play a crucial role, providing benefits to both producers and consumers. In addition, the application of quality schemes and certification ensures and improves the positive impact of traditional food production and consumption on the local economy and rural area development [3][19][21][22][23].

Food quality schemes or food certification programs are established to ensure the safety, quality, and sustainability of food products by guaranteeing that they meet certain predetermined quality standards. Specific criteria and requirement standards are defined for each quality scheme and certification program to protect product quality, safety, and uniqueness [4][19][20]. During the certification process, independent accredited third-party organizations assess whether products comply with the established quality standards and criteria. The importance of quality schemes and certifications is significant. Primarily, these schemes assure consumers, retailers, and regulatory bodies that food products meet specific standards [23]. Furthermore, producers receive feedback and recommendations to enhance product quality and identify possible areas for improvement and innovation. Finally, certifications can enter certain markets and create various business opportunities [4][19][21].

## 5. Specially Labeled Food Products

Specially labeled food products are food items with unique characteristics and qualities are specially labeled. These labels are used to provide consumers with information about the product's nutritional content, potential health benefits, and production methods. Some examples of specially labeled food products are organic products, additive-free products, GMO-free products, products free from added sugar, allergen-free products, gluten-free products, etc. [27][28][29]. Health and nutrition policies are, in many cases, key factors that influence consumer choices. For example, public health policies recommend limited sugar intake due to the potential to cause risks of obesity, diabetes, and heart diseases [30][31][32]. Also, with higher consumer consciousness and awareness about their health and the quality of the food they consume in recent years, their preferences towards clean labeled and slow food are on the rise. Both slow food and clean label focus on promoting food quality, sustainability, and transparency, with slow food emphasizing the importance of local, sustainable, and traditional food production, and clean label emphasizing the naturalness of ingredients and the absence of artificial additives, preservatives, and synthetic ingredients [27][28][33][34][35][36][37].

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