

Assessing quality and safety of food and beverage products in Albanian processing enterprises

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Summary (Ph.D)

It is obvious that the consumers, for many reasons, do not have the possibilities to control directly, before buying the product, the quality and the safety of the products realized by the enterprise. Although they demand to buy products in the market having primarily in mind the certainty or better to say a sufficient reliability for the quality. The mechanism that realizes this demand today is the certification, a process that every product and system of quality and safety management in an enterprise undergoes. The management of quality and safety is concretized in the framework of a special system: as an international system for quality and safety, under the care of the special international organizations; as a national system, under the care of the respective ministries and institutions of a country; and as a system of quality and safety of a certain enterprise, established and maintained by the directorate of this enterprise.

The attention in this analysis is more focused on the management of products quality and safety issues in the level of businesses, practically in the FBE level. In this study the elaboration of these issues is done in the logical sequence of the consumer – the standards and legislation – the quality and the safety of the products in the enterprise – the certification according to the standards and in the end some general data regarding food and beverage enterprises.

The changes that have occurred in the Albanian market of the food products and beverages, especially the increase of the quantity and variety, have created a new content and form not only of the relations of the market with the FBE but also of the

relations between these enterprises. Among the main features of this situation we are interested to mention: consumers set higher expectations, especially the strengthening of their qualitative requirements, and facing fierce competition between the enterprises. Such a situation imposes changes and transformations to the FBE, not only evolutionary changes but in some aspects even revolutionary changes.

The big number of imports have transformed the internal market of food products and beverages in “an international market” these 15 last years of transition period; in this market co-live in a continuous competition the foreign products and the national ones. The export of the food products and beverages, although in low quantities and very spontaneous, has started to make the FBE aware of the competition with the western enterprises in the foreign markets “ring”, which today is considered as a global market.

The agreements that the Albanian Government has signed with the WTO and EU such as the Agreement on the Technical Barriers of Commerce with WTO and the Stabilization-Association Agreement with EU, among others treat also the technical problems related directly to the “pillars” of the “Temple of quality”: standardization, metrology, accreditation and certification. It is on these ‘pillars’ that the restructured and reformed Albanian enterprise should be set, so that it can overcome the obstacles in the global commerce.

FBE, regardless of their real level, are making attempts and are being prepared to face the inevitable challenge of the multi-plan development that is related to the economic, technical, human, managerial aspects and especially with their mentality and culture.

Even for the Albanian enterprises the purpose of the establishment and development is and shall be the profit. The profit and its necessary increase is closely related to the investment made from the enterprise, but with different attitudes: in the low stages of the development of the enterprise it is characteristic the implementation of short-term investment, that is led by the slogan “I am investing today so I gain the profit still today”; whereas in the high stages of development and existence of a competitive market acquiring a slogan such as “I am investing today so that I gain the profit tomorrow or the day after tomorrow” makes the enterprise to think and work firstly for realizing the long-term investment, which is an investment that provides a more

sustainable and safe survival in the market, and a strategic profit. It is the indicator of the long-term investments that is one of the important indicators through which can be evaluated the level reached in the economic-technical-human-managerial level of the enterprises. In order to establish and to put in function the certification system there are needed some requirements from the consumers side, which are the regulators in the markets (legislation, ministries, different organizations), etc. but also from the enterprises side. But regardless the level that is achieved it is important to define the indicator, through which is measured the quality and safety level in an enterprise, in an industrial sector, and even in a state; nowadays this indicator is the certification indicator.

As stated above, the food and beverage products besides the problems related to the quality bear also safety-related problems. The latter are of particular importance and are related with the so-called “consumer protection” for they are related with potential risks or harms of consumers health in using and consuming the products produced by the part of processing enterprises.

The legislation on food and beverage products quality and safety, as part of the general legislation of the Republic of Albania, is based on the respective legislation of the European Union. Intensification of completion of this legislation is encouraged and supported mainly by the international agreement, where a special part covers the Stabilization- Association Agreement, which stipulates and conditions, among others, the adaptation of European Directives on approximation of infrastructure of products quality and safety with the European one, and harmonization of legal acts and relevant by-acts (technical regulations, decisions, orders, guidelines).

In order to explore the possibilities and the potential trends of the development in the field of products quality and safety, a detailed analyses of the current situation of the FBE is done, based in the data gathered in the survey of the FBE sample, which is considered as a good representative of this sector of the processing industry. Face to face interview survey method was used to investigate the Food and Beverage Enterprises (FBE) in Albania regarding quality and safety. Albanian food and beverage enterprises comprise the basis of the selected sample. A sample of 112 enterprises was chosen for interview and the questionnaire was completed by 106

enterprises. The respondents were mainly managers, owners or high level personnel of the selected food and beverage processing enterprises. A descriptive statistical analysis was used to elaborate the situation in food and beverage industry in Albania and the model of ordinal logistic regression to quantify the effects of different management factors on different quality management aspects.

According to the enterprises, informing activities from the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Consumer Protection (MoAFCP) are weak or absent; only the inspection activity is done well. More than half of the enterprises surveyed have allocated the competencies regarding quality and safety in their respective departments. FBE operate mostly in domestic markets (local and national) only with some exceptions. 95 percent of enterprises communicate with customers regarding product quality and safety, and this communication appears to be the main source of information in this regard. Information from scientific studies is rarely used for decision making in terms of quality.

The enterprises standards are widely used for compiling technical specifications for their products, while international standards are used only in some enterprises. Almost all FBE think that their production technology responds to the product quality and safety requirements. All of them stated full compliance of their production activities with requirements of Good Management Practices. In more than half of FBE lab facilities are missing and half of the enterprises don't measure any characteristic. The qualification of employees in terms of quality and safety is missing but enterprises express their willingness to invest on trainings. In majority of the cases materials related to product quality and safety are provided from governmental agencies. 75 percent of FBE have their products labeled and certified whereas 21 percent of them express the willingness to invest in label improvement or relabeling. Nearly three fourth of FBE do not apply international quality management standards (ISO, HACCP, TQM), but they feel the necessity of applying and certifying these systems.

From regression analysis it has been found that information generally, and activities from MoAFCP in terms of quality and safety in particular have a great impact on enterprises willingness to invest in QMS, whereas trainings of employees, focusing on after sale and on product delivery, application of client technical specification appear

to a prerequisite entering in high competitive markets. On the other hand, application of management standards and certification, qualification of employees, increased level of information on quality standards and updated production technology result to have a big impact on enterprises annual turnover and in ratio export/annual turnover.

It is recommended that MoAFCP and all related governmental agencies such as Veterinary Institute, Commerce and Industry Chamber and General Directorate of Standardization must put more efforts on information and communication activities in terms of food and beverage quality and safety and also on quality management standards, whereas food and beverage enterprises must seriously address the issues of alternative sources of information, improving their organizational structure, upgrading production technology, investing in trainings, investing in label improvement and product certification, application and certification of QMS, as prerequisites for increasing business performance.