How Sustainable is Food Consumption in Romania

Oana BRINZAN, Eugenia TIGAN

Faculty of Food Engineering, Tourism and Environmental Protection, “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad, Arad, str. Elena Drăgoi, no 2, 310330, e-mail: oanabrinzan@yahoo.com, oanab@uav.ro

Abstract. Sustainable food consume is not just about how much food we consume is about what sort of food consume too. Food consume is depending by our lifestyle, our income, information, market offer. Our food consume drag an entire chain reaction determined by technological production, processing technology, energy spent of preserving and transportation, packaging, preparation procedures and waste quantity. Our choices will generate an economic reaction and will generate social costs that we are not aware of. Our decision is about consuming less or better about what to consume. The statistical numbers show that Romanians are consuming more in numbers of calories and are consuming more food from export, generating a huge environmental impact.

Keywords: agriculture, environment, food, consume, consumers, sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable consumption was appointed for the first time in Agenda 21; the main instrument of sustainable development drows after the United Nation Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janiero in 1992. Here for the first time was established a program in order to change consume patterns that underlined that the wealth and prosperity, a high standards of living that we are willing to achieve could not be reached if we are not using in a conscious way the resources. Our live standard, our level of living, is closely depended by the resource exploitation and a examination of consume habits, patterns, behaviour, choices, ”consumersm” and future expectations is necessary (UNDP, 1999).

During the next Earth Summit in 2002 the problem of sustainable consumer was a special chapter of discussions and was considered one of the most important themes of the meeting. The Earth Summit that was held in Johannesburg focused on improving the technology and supply on the market better eco-products, services and infrastructure (UN, 2005).

How consume could be more sustainable varied between consuming more efficiently, consume more responsibly or consume less.

An accepted definition by all sides is telling us that sustainable consume means consuming more sustainable products and this is achieved primarily through improvements in productivity trough which resources are converted into economic goods.

DISCUSSIONS

The consumers are not consume directly just the product itself, the consume involve many other aspects, we consume services and infrastructure for provide the food to the right place, into the proper conditions of food safety, we have different consumer behaviour that are given by our needs, like our nutritional necessities and health, by a certain opportunity
given by food prices by example and by our ability to purchase a certain quantity and quality for a certain price (OECD, 2001).

The first reaction when our income is slightly increasing is that we buy a larger quantity of food. We show off our social status through how much we buy and how expensive it is. A great lesson that we have to learn is that we are what we are and not what we consume. It is not a utopia that overconsumption has social miss benefits and the consumption reduction will generate social benefits, so for a better living, consume less. But sometimes for certain an individual consuming less is unacceptable so changing consumer patterns and consumer behaviour is more plausible. So what is must be done, give consumers sufficient information to make their own choices. Consumers have to know that each decision will generate an entire chain of reaction. Each food involve a certain resource consume, depending on the chosen technology. A large quantity of energy is consumed for preservation and transport; it is what is named "food miles". As far as our food is coming from as much energy is spent on it. So as consumers we have to understand that our economic costs will drag after them social costs that are not covered by individuals, they are covered by all of us through resource inefficient exploitation and in the same time by nobody as long as the ecosystem is overexploited.

Impacts from food produced by intensive agriculture can be greater than food produced using organic methods. Meat and vegetables from organic and intensive production were evaluated according to a set of environmental factors. Meat from intensive agriculture was found to have twice the environmental pressure score as organic meat, while the difference between vegetables from intensive agriculture and organic agriculture differed by a factor of more than three (European Commission, 2007). Other studies have shown that organic milk production is almost five times more energy efficient on a per animal basis and three-and-a-half times more energy efficient per litre of milk than intensive milk production (ADAS Consulting, 2001).

The impact that is generated by our choices in food consumes and will generate an entire mechanism. We have to take in consideration where food is produced, where and how is processed, how is packaged and what sort of package we are buying, the amount of energy spent on preservation and transportation, prepared and disposed after that. Rarely so large studies are taken and none were made in Romania.

Looking closer to statistical studies that were made and to numbers from national statistical dates are analysed is easily to observe how food consume developed in the last 10 years. The nutritional aspects were analysed, expressed in the calories number, the national food production, our food consume and how much food is imported and exported.

The agriculture of Romania is characterised by a dual-farm structure: very large corporate farms with an average size of several hundred hectares coexists with small private family farms. Whereas some of the latter are market oriented, others are operated al subsistence and semi-subsistence level.

In Romania as in the most East European countries food industry has an important place covering 18% of the manufacturing process (at current price, 2007) not just because is a highly productive industry, but this is due the fact of under developing of other industries (UNIDO, 2009).

For 2007 the total employment of labour force in agriculture was 29.5% of total employment. The agro-food trade of Romania with other EU countries 3.7% of total exports to the EU(27) and the imports are reaching 6.6% of total imports from the EU(27), so the trade balance is in deficit with -1594 EUR (UNIDO, 2009).

Looking at GDP per capita in PPP (Purchasing Power Parties) as an indicator for the relative development level of countries, East European countries among them Romania are
less developed comparative with West European ones, Romania range at the level of 40%, but the GDP is growing faster in this countries so the PPP the same. The food and beverage in household consumption has an average number of 30% for 2007 (UNIDO, 2009).

Looking closer to the daily average food consumption expressed in number of calories consumed per inhabitant, it could be easier observed that it increase from 3053 calories in 2990 to 3455 calories in 2006, increased based on vegetal and animal origin food in the same time. But it is well known that there is a different impact generated by animal origin food products and vegetal origin food products. In Romania the average consume of meet per inhabitant increased from 46.5 kg/year in 2000 to 69.9 kg/year, a substantial increasing of meet product consume (INSSE, 2009).

An European Comparison Project (ECP) run by Eurostat observed that the price of the food is negatively correlated with the real income level, observing that food is more expensive in poor countries, and in the same time the food consume in these countries is relatively high (UNIDO, 2009).

Despite of this we consume larger quantities of food, both animal and vegetal food product and a large quantity from export sources even if the national food production increased. We consume meat food products being uniformed by the environmental impact generated by animal husbandry and by the impact generated by all processing stages.

CONCLUSIONS

A sustainable consume could be put in practice through political and legislative measures, like facilitate access to more sustainable choices like eco-food and local products, support local initiatives and local food market structures. Another powerful instrument is education that will change over time behaviour pattern; lifestyle and we will learn to consume food conscious and to respect the resource allocation, the social benefit and the environment preservation.

REFERENCES