

Study on Milk and Dairy Products Consumers Preferences in Timis and Caras-Severin Counties from Romania

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Abstract

Following the elimination of the EU milk quota system in dairy cattle, starting 2015, this has raised a great number of questions and concerns regarding the future of the dairy sector. Aim of the current research was to evaluate milk and dairy derived consumer's behaviour and preferences in Timis and Caras-Severin counties from Western Romania, in order to be able to further formulate advice and strategies to both farmers, farm-advisors and policy makers. Data was collected following questionnaire based-interviews, between January and June 2016. There were 202 persons who answered a face-to-face interview, and had to answer to a 15 questions based questionnaire. The main six categories of products purchased were raw fresh milk (13.45%), yogurts (16.42%), sour cream (15.51%), butter (13.00%) and cheeses (19.84%). Out of the respondents, 60.95% preferred cow milk and derived products, 19.68% sheep milk and derived products, 12.38% goat milk and derived products and 6.98% buffalo milk and derived products. Findings of the current study could help both dairy farmers and dairy factories to come up with new products and also in the decision making process when changing the type of products, and also to find new ways to increase their sales, and the overall enterprise economic returns.

Keywords: cattle, dairy sector, goats, raw milk, sheep.

1. Introduction

Following the elimination of the European Union's milk quota system in dairy cattle, starting April 2015, this has raised a great number of questions and concerns regarding the future of the dairy sector, the existence of dairy enterprises and the over-production of milk [1]. Romania alongside other European Union's member countries and candidate members (e.g. Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia), especially ones situated in

Eastern and South-Eastern regions, are in consequence realistically concerned.

Romania's dairy sector remains dominated by small-size farms (extensive, low-input, family farms). Despite unfavorable market conditions such as current selling prices and pressure from neighboring dairy producers (Hungary, Poland), commercial farms are committed to develop further [2]. The newly introduced fiscal measure of reducing the Value Added Tax (VAT) from 24% to 9% supported an increase in consumer demand for dairy products, partially covered by imports. Cow milk production reached 4.371 billion litres in 2014, an increase of 3.1 percent compared to 2013. The slow rise in the milk production could be attributed to the introduction of governmental subsidies and also, as a result of

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efforts made by farmers to improve the genetics of their herds.

Romania ranks 3rd in the EU in terms of sheep number (9.8 millions) and 4th for goats (1.2 million), breeding mainly double- or triple-purpose breeds (meat-milk or meat-milk-wool) [3, 4]. Moreover, the country has a pasture surface of 4.9 million ha, which could sustain up to 16 million sheep and goats [5, 6]. With more than 95% of sheep and goats being reared under extensive low-input production systems and the breed structure being dominated by indigenous, unimproved breeds [7-10].

Aim of the current research was to evaluate milk and dairy derived consumer's behavior and preferences in Timis and Caras-Severin counties from Western Romania, in order to be able to further formulate advice and strategies to both farmers, farm-advisors and policy makers.

2. Materials and methods

The study was conducted within the frame of the project 'Improving Sustainability, Competitiveness and Quality of Milk in the Romanian-Republic of Serbia Cross-Border Region', project MIS ETC number 1233, supported by European Union through a grant of the Romania – Republic of Serbia IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme.

Data was collected following questionnaire based-interviews, between January and June 2016. There were 202 persons who answered a face-to-face interview, and had to answer to a 15 questions based questionnaire, all respondents were from Timis or Caras-Severin Counties.

Out of the total respondents, 43.28% were women and 56.72% men, while 50.75% were living in urban areas and 49.25% in rural areas. Out of the persons who participated in the survey, 5.58% graduated the elementary school (mainly farmers), 40.10% secondary studies (high school) and 54.31% had a university degree or were students at the moment of the interview. In the questionnaires, personal data was evaluated, such as: age, sex, access to media (e.g. television, written press, and internet), place of living (urban/rural), average monthly income, and current occupation.

In order to evaluate the milk and dairy derived products consumer's behavior, a set of 8 questions

were given, as follows: do you consume milk and milk derived products?; which dairy products you are consuming?; which type of milk do you prefer?; how often do you consume milk?; how often do you consume milk derived products?; which are the reasons for consuming milk and milk products?; which are the main selection criteria when purchasing milk/milk products?; and where do you buy your milk and dairy products?. For all questions, multiple answers were allowed.

3. Results and discussion

Data regarding general dairy products consumed by the respondents and their preferences as consumers of milk and dairy derived products are shown in Table 1. The main six categories of products purchased were raw fresh milk (13.45%), yogurts (16.42%), sour cream (15.51%), butter (13.00%) and cheeses (19.84%). The least consumed dairy derived products were UHT milk (6.61%), refrigerated milk (0.57%) and frozen milk (0.57%). Results of the current study should be taken into consideration by both farmers and dairy factories, in order to possible identify niche markets, in order to add value to the food chain and improve their economic returns.

Main selection criteria for milk and derived dairy products are being presented in Table 2. Thus, the most important selection criteria of the surveyed consumers were 'freshness' (19.84%), expiring date (15.11%), taste characteristics (11.30%) and nutritive value (11.88%). While, the least important aspects when purchasing dairy products were presentation/label (2.31%), price (3.34%) and quality/price ratio (8.07%).

Regarding the reason for consuming milk and derived products, 51.60% of the respondents perceived that 'it is a main product in my diet', 32.22% answered 'it is a healthier product than other animal derived foods (e.g. meat, eggs)' and 12.18% answered 'it was recommended by my doctor as treatment'.

Out of the respondents, 60.95% preferred cow milk and derived products, 19.68% sheep milk and derived products, 12.38% goat milk and derived products and 6.98% buffalo milk and derived products (Figure 1). It is worth mentioning, that in markets, there is no sheep and/or buffalo raw milk that could be purchased, only milk derived

products from this two species (cheeses and yogurts).

As for the frequency in consuming milk, 43.00% of the respondents seem to consume milk daily, 24.00% on a weekly basis, 24.50% twice a week and 8.50% monthly (Figure 2). While for the dairy derived products, most (52.24%) of the respondents consume them daily, 29.35% weekly,

14.93% twice per week and 3.48% monthly (Figure 3).

Being asked where they purchase their milk and dairy derived products from, 41.81% of the subjects answered that from private producers, 28.76% from commercial centres (super-markets), 23.75% from groceries stores (local, small businesses) and 5.69% other places.

Table 1. Dairy products categories and consumers preferences

Category	No of respondents	% of respondents
Raw fresh milk	118	13.45
Pasteurized milk	73	8.32
UHT milk	58	6.61
Refrigerated milk	5	0.57
Frozen milk	5	0.57
Yogurts	144	16.42
Sour cream	136	15.51
Butter	114	13.00
Cheeses	174	19.84
Other	50	5.70

Table 2. Selection criteria for purchasing milk and dairy derived products

Selection criterions	No of respondents	% of respondents
Freshness	172	19.84
General aspect	74	8.54
Expiring date	131	15.11
Smell	85	9.80
Taste characteristics	98	11.30
Origin	85	9.80
Quality/price ratio	70	8.07
Price	29	3.34
Nutritive value	103	11.88
Presentation	20	2.31
Others	0	0

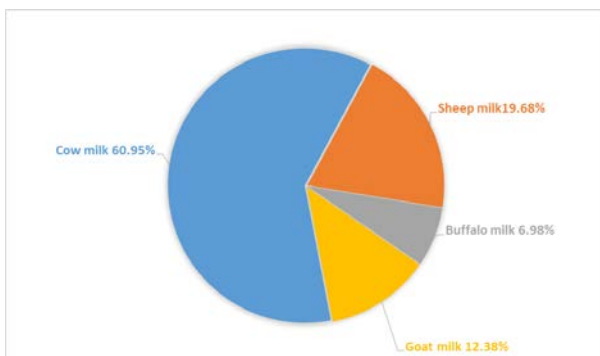


Figure 1. Species preferences of consumers for milk and dairy derived products

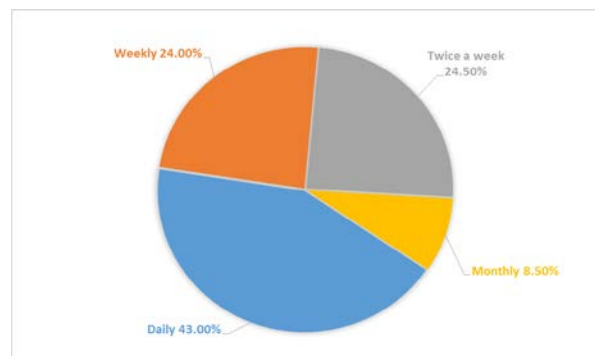


Figure 2. Frequency of consuming milk among respondents

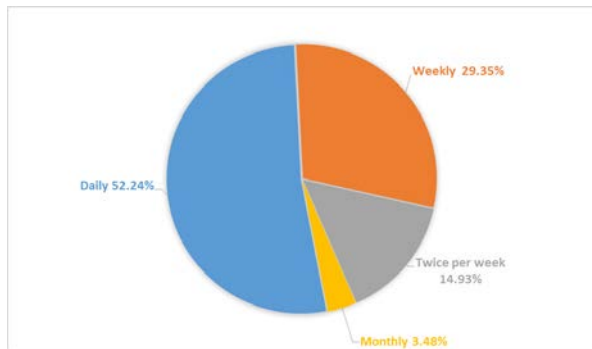


Figure 3. Frequency of consuming dairy derived products among respondents

4. Conclusions

Given the current volatility of the dairy sector in Romania, the current market assessment on consumer's preferences and behavior was considered necessary.

Findings of the current study could help both dairy farmers (cattle, sheep and goats) and dairy factories to come up with new products and also in the decision making process when changing the type of products, and also to find new ways to increase their sales, and the overall enterprise economic returns.

According to the results shown in the current study, there is a preference for sheep and buffalo milk, which is not available on the current local markets, this could be a niche market for some of the local farmers.

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