

THE SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS OF EU QUALITY SCHEMES - A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to examine consumer insight and understanding towards the sustainability of agro-food products certified with EU quality schemes from the perspective of the three pillars: environmental, social, and economic. This review paper is based on analyzing the specialized literature through a search method. Using a predefined set of keywords, a search was conducted in the leading scientific databases, such as Web of Science (WOS), Google Scholar, and Scopus. The findings reveal that EU-certified food products have been awarded by consumers an impressive score in terms of environmental, social, and economic roles, the agricultural products certified with EU quality schemes being highly regarded from all three viewpoints. This review will benefit as an outset for actors such as farmers, retailers, and authorities to implement consumer information campaigns to assist them in making correct and healthy choices regarding food purchases. This study may have some limitations. The sustainability of products labelled with EU quality schemes is delivered from the consumers' perspective. As future research directions, the sustainability of such products could be examined from the perspective of some technological indicators, such as price, carbon footprint, water footprint, employment ratio and others.

Key words: consumer perceptions, EU quality schemes, economic pillar, environmental pillar, social pillar, sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable production and consumption are two essential conditions for sustainable development (Bengtsson et al., 2018; Prati, 2022). Jung et al. (2020) found that there are two dominant ways of thinking about these topics: one focuses on encouraging more systematic production methods and products (principally along with technological enhancement and knowledgeable consumer choice), while the other emphasizes the need to take into account overall consumption volumes, distributional concerns, and associated economic, social and environmental changes (Wang et al., 2019). Consumption that also is sustainable can include both sustainable attitudes and sustainable actions (Bryła, 2019).

Consumers have an "attitudinal gap" or "value-action shortfall," as over 30 percent of them report being deeply distressed about environmental, social or economic issues (Monier-Dilhan et al., 2021) but finding it difficult to turn this concern into purchases (Jung et al., 2020). It is increasingly recognized that consumer-oriented policy is a key lever for achieving a sustainable food system (Moran et al., 2018), even if it is only the front line (Springmann et al., 2018). Food waste reduction and diet change are among the most common goals (Rogissart et al., 2019; Bonnet et al., 2020). Providing consumers with information on sustainable production processes and informing them of their choice could also be an encouraging

way forward, provided that these practices are effectively communicated to them. This is the exact role certified foods play (Mancini et al., 2019; Hindsley et al., 2020; McClure & Seock, 2020).

In 2012, the European Union (EU) passed the Quality Package Directive (EU) No. 1151/2012) for improving the operation of Geographical Indications (GIs) certification quality schemes, which were initially based on standard procedures (Eur-lex, 2012). The Regulation details the rationale for promoting GIs as a way to ensure fair incomes for farmers and processors as well as to improve consumer education through proper labeling (Eur-lex, 2012). These labels are listed under GIs, Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) which identifies the location and method of processing the food products and Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) which certifies both the farmers' and processors' location and techniques. Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) also represents an EU quality scheme that emphasizes traditional attributes of the product, such as its composition or method of manufacture, without being geographically restricted. PDO and PGI represent two of the highest quality food certifications in the EU, accounting for 4%, respectively of 5.7% of international retail transactions in EU member states with available data (FiBL, 2017).

Accordingly, this paper aims to determine the sustainability of agro-food products certified with EU quality schemes from a consumer's perspective. These products will be analysed from the perspective of the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, economic, and social. This review will benefit as an outset for actors such as farmers, retailers, and authorities to implement consumer information campaigns to assist them in making correct and healthy choices regarding food purchases. The review paper continues with the presentation of the material and the method, followed by the results and related discussions. The article is concluded in a concise manner employing conclusions, practical implications, limitations, and future research directions.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the attempt to discern the impact of food products certified with EU quality systems regarding the three pillars of sustainability, a comprehensive literature review was carried out using with the aid of a predefined set of keywords (Figure 1), a search method previously reported by other authors from scientific literature, such as Campos et al. (2011), Grunert & Aachmann (2016), Hosu et al. (2022), Glogoveţan et al. (2022) in the Web of Science (WOS) and other relevant scientific databases. The time frame covered in the literature review ranged from 2008 to 2022. For obtaining results from a variety of fields and areas of study, the most suitable databases were consulted. The 29 reviewed publications (Appendix) principally originate from the next research databases: Web of Science, Science Direct, and Scopus.

After a thorough analysis of the publications, three directions of study were established based on the reported results: what impact does PDO, PGI and TSG products achieve on the social pillar of sustainability from the consumers' perspective, what would be their viewpoints about the economic aspect of agro-food products certified with EU quality schemes and what performance do these products exhibit in terms of environmental sustainability.

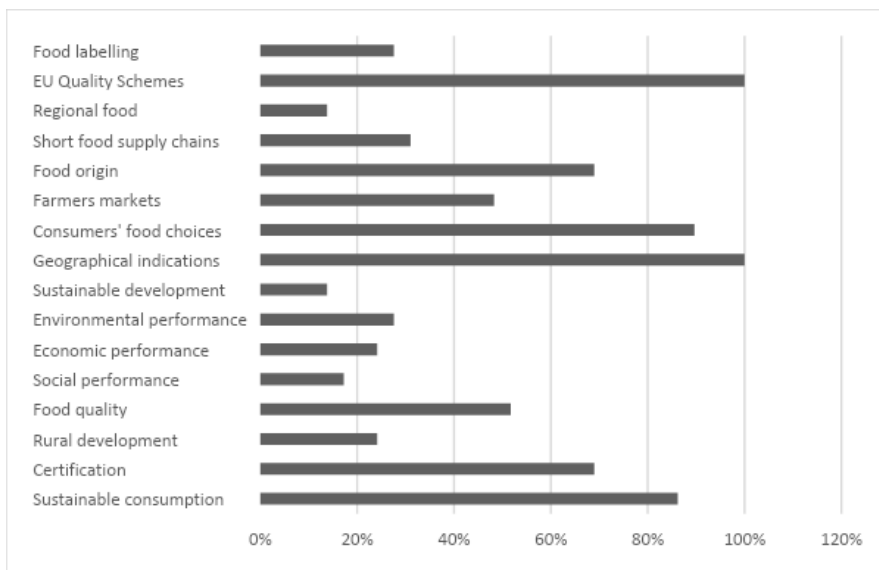


Figure 1. Number of reviewed papers by key words. Source: Own developing.

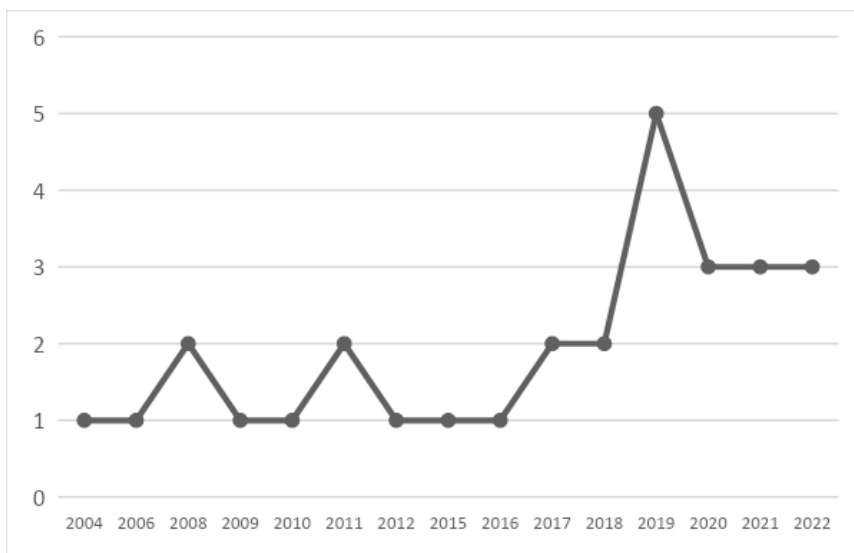


Figure 2. Literature reviewed by year of publication. Source: Own developing.

The aggregation by year of the evaluated literature is presented in Figure 2. The increased number of publications after 2015 may indicate that the sustainability of agri-food products certified with EU quality schemes has become an issue that has accumulated progressive awareness in the last years. The geographic areas of the countries where the studies were performed are presented in Figure 3. The intensity of some areas of the heat map exhibits a broad interest in the sustainability of EU quality schemes.



Figure 3. Geographic heatmap of the revised literature. Source: Own developing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To determine the sustainability of agri-food processes and their outputs, it would be necessary first to clarify what the term sustainability represents. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provides guidelines on sustainability, affirming that both the management and exemplary conservation of natural resources need to secure that the present and future generations can enjoy continuous satisfaction in fulfilling human needs (Arfini & Bellassen, 2019). Such sustainable development (in the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors) conserves soil, water, plant, and animal genetic resources. It is also environmentally non-degrading, technically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable (Bellassen et al., 2022).

Sustainability involves multifaceted dimensions that must be perceived as a whole system. Apart from other various factors, the attributes of the production process influence the uniqueness of the certified food products, but most importantly, the consumer's understanding of quality and worth (Conner et al., 2010; Angowski & Jarosz-Angowska, 2020). This is an important finding in the understanding of the EU quality schemes because the region (including the region's biodiversity and human skills) plays a particularly important role (Arfini et al., 2019; Toma et al., 2022). This yields increasingly good impressions from the consumers, suggesting that the most favored label was PDO. The PDO indication assured the consumers that the products are from a certain area which is well preserved and protected, the pollution is reduced (Rabadán et al., 2021) and the landscape is conserved, ensuring the environmental sustainability of these products (Alkon, 2008b; Gracia & de-Magistris, 2016; Cozzi et al., 2018; Arfini et al., 2019).

A key element of the EU quality schemes is represented by the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics that are regarded by consumers (Botonaki et al., 2006). Thus, looking at various actors (such as farmers, distributors, retailers, authorities), they can

shape the consumers' perceptions and understanding of EU quality schemes regarding sustainability (Chalupová et al., 2020). A similar pattern of results was obtained, where information campaigns have led to the perception of products certified with quality schemes as strongly economically sustainable because the rural areas are supported by agrotourism (Feagan et al., 2004; Silkes, 2012; Rinaldi 2017; Kaczorowska et al., 2019; Vakoufaris & Gocci, 2022). A large part of the products certified with EU quality schemes is produced in hard-to-reach agricultural areas (Sacchi et al., 2018). Other studies have shown that the financial support of the regional producers and local communities is ensured through the purchase of these products, which ultimately contribute to the sustainable development of the regions. Therefore, the economic pillar of sustainability is highlighted (Farmer et al., 2011; Lombardo, 2021).

Extensive results carried out show that the EU quality schemes certified products enclose social equity considering the participation of women and young farmers, which is encouraged and sustained (Nastis & Papanagiotou, 2009; O’Kane & Yuliani Wijaya, 2015; Kavuma et al., 2022). Currently, sustainable development in the rural environment is closely related to entrepreneurship in such areas (Alkon, 2008a; Alkon & McCullen, 2011; Warsaw et al., 2021). These basic findings are consistent with research showing that young rural farmers offer hope for economic diversification in rural areas in which certified agricultural products with EU quality schemes are manufactured (Balezentis et al., 2020; Ottomano et al., 2022). Others have found that the existence of young farmers and their participation in sustainable development guarantees the viability of rural areas because the young generation of farmers enthusiastically adopts new agricultural and management technologies (Watts et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2022). Also, entrepreneurship in rural areas is encouraged by the fact that it gives women autonomy and monetary independence (Nastis & Papanagiotou, 2009; Kavuma et al., 2022). Figure 4 summarizes the results identified and displays the sustainable features of agro-food products certified under EU quality schemes regarding the pillars of sustainability.



Figure 4. EU quality schemes products' sustainability. Source: own developing.

The findings of this review are consistent with prior research, suggesting that the sustainability of agri-food products certified with EU quality schemes is a current topic and of interest to various parties. In line with the previous results, Laurent et al., 2017 identified that dairy cheese is sustainable from a social and environmental point

of view due to the fact that the production of cheese favors the development of farms and the rural area, but also the rational conservation of natural resources (water). Another result is broadly in line, supporting that dairy cow farms play an essential role in the environmental sustainability of the PDO label. This label guarantees the quality and origin of the product (Cayre et al., 2018). Furthermore, it helps to ensure that high environmental sustainability standards, such as reducing pesticides, promoting biodiversity, and conserving natural resources, are applied (Cayre et al., 2018).

Rabadán et al. (2021) have demonstrated that PDO-certified olive oil is produced using a sustainable resource management system. Other authors have shown that diversification in farming systems can help maximize the sustainability of PDO products (Maini et al., 2021). According to other results, cluster farmers producing PDO olives can improve production and increase economic sustainability (Egea & Pérez, 2016).

Sustainability is becoming a critical factor in EU quality schemes and ensures that production processes are efficient, environmentally friendly, and respectful of human rights (Angowski & Jarosz-Angowska, 2020). Considering this finding, the food products labelled with EU quality schemes evolved to become more sustainable, giving consumers the confidence that their food is sustainable and of high quality (Rabadán et al., 2021).

It is also worth discussing the results of Flinzberger et al. (2022), according to which PDO food products are central to environmental protection and landscape conservation. The sustainable system management of these products allows the maintaining a region's natural, cultural, and economic assets (Flinzberger et al., 2022, García-Martín et al., 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

The present review paper analyses the sustainability of food products certified with EU quality schemes. These products enjoy economic, social, and environmental benefits that add to sustainable development based on consumer perceptions and understanding. As for the environmental pillar, EU quality schemes products contribute to the preservation of the soil and landscapes, as well as to the reduction of pollution.

Regarding the economic pillar, products labelled with EU quality schemes contribute significantly to the economic support of rural areas through the purchase of these products and agrotourism. From the point of view of the social pillar, products certified with EU quality schemes enclose equity for women, giving them economic independence in the rural environment. At the same time, the involvement of young farmers in economic diversification in rural areas is noteworthy.

This review will benefit as an outset for actors such as farmers, retailers, and authorities to implement consumer information campaigns to assist them in making correct and healthy choices regarding food purchases. This study may have some limitations given the fact that the sustainability of products labelled with EU quality schemes is delivered from the consumers' perspective.

As future research directions, the sustainability of such products could be examined from the perspective of some technological indicators, such as price, carbon footprint, water footprint, employment ratio and others.

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Appendix:

	Year	Article
Alkon, Alison	2008	From value to values: Sustainable consumption at farmers markets
Alkon, Alison	2008	Paradise or pavement: the social constructions of the environment in two urban farmers' markets and their implications for environmental justice and sustainability
Alkon, Alison, Christie Grace McCullen	2011	Whiteness and farmers markets: Performances, perpetuations... contestations?
Angowski, M., Aneta Jarosz-Angowska	2020	Importance of Regional and Traditional EU Quality Schemes in Young Consumer Food Purchasing Decisions
Arfini, F., F. Antonioli, Elena Cozzi, Michele Donati, Marianna Guareschi, Maria Cecilia Mancini, M. Veneziani	2019	Sustainability, innovation, and rural development: The case of Parmigiano-Reggiano PDO
Arfini, F., V. Bellassen	2019	Sustainability of European food quality schemes: multi-performance, structure, and governance of PDO, PGI, and organic agri-food systems
Bellassen, V., M. Drut, M. Hilal, A. Bodini, Michele Donati, M. D. de Labarre, Jelena Filipović et al.	2022	The economic, environmental, and social performance of European certified food
Botonaki, Anna, K. Polymeros, E. Tsakiridou, K. Mattas	2006	The role of food quality certification on consumers' food choices
Bryła, P., 2019	2019	Regional ethnocentrism on the food market as a pattern of sustainable consumption
Chalupová, Martina, S. Rojík, Hana Kotoučková, Lenka Kauerová	2020	Food labels (quality, origin, and sustainability): The experience of Czech producers
Conner, D., Kathryn Colasanti, R. B. Ross, Susan B. Smalley	2010	Locally grown foods and farmers markets: Consumer attitudes and behaviors
Cozzi, Elena, F. Arfini, Michele Donati, Marianna Guareschi, Maria Cecilia Mancini, D. Menozzi, M. Veneziani	2018	The socio-economic sustainability of food quality schemes (FQSs): the case of Parmigiano Reggiano PDO
Farmer, J. R., C. Chancellor, A. Gooding, Devorah Shubowitz, Adrienne Bryant	2011	A Tale of Four Farmers Markets: Recreation and Leisure as a Catalyst for Sustainability
Feagan, R., D. Morris, Karen Krug	2004	Niagara region farmers' markets: local food systems and sustainability considerations
Gracia, Azucena, Tiziana de-Magistris	2016	Consumer preferences for food labeling: what ranks first?
Kaczorowska, Joanna, Krystyna Rejman, Ewa Halicka, Agata Szczybyło, Hanna Górską-Warsewicz	2019	Impact of food sustainability labels on the perceived product value and price expectations of urban consumers
Lombardo, L., Camilla Farolfi, E. Capri	2021	Sustainability certification, a new path of value creation in the olive oil sector: The Italian case study
Mancini, Maria Cecilia, D. Menozzi, Michele Donati, Beatrice Biasini, M. Veneziani, F. Arfini	2019	Producers' and consumers' perception of the sustainability of short food supply chains: The case of Parmigiano Reggiano PDO
McClure, Clair, Yoo-Kyoung Seock	2020	The role of involvement: Investigating the effect of brand's social media pages on consumer purchase intention
Monier-Dilhan, Sylvette, T. Poméon, M. Böhm, Ruzica Brečić, P. Csillag, Michele Donati, H. Ferrer-Pérez et al.	2021	Do food quality schemes and net price premiums go together?

Nastis, S. A., E. Papanagiotou, 2009	2009	Dimensions of sustainable rural development in mountainous and less favored areas: Evidence from Greece
O’Kane, Gabrielle, Steffiana Yuliani Wijaya	2015	Contribution of farmers’ markets to more socially sustainable food systems: A pilot study of a farmers’ market in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)
Rinaldi, Chiara	2017	Food and gastronomy for sustainable place development: A multidisciplinary analysis of different theoretical approaches
Sacchi, Giovanna, L. Cei, G. Stefani, Ginevra Virginia Lombardi, B. Rocchi, G. Belletti, Susanne Padel et al.	2018	A multi-actor literature review on alternative and sustainable food systems for the promotion of cereal biodiversity
Silkes, Carol, 2012	2012	Farmers' markets: A case for culinary tourism
Toma, P., F. Manta, D. Morrone, F. Campobasso	2022	Familiar worldwide: how PDO products reflect quality in consumers' appraisal and behaviour
Vakoufaris, H., A. Gocci	2022	Geographical Indications and Sustainable Development: An Assessment of Four Categories of Products from the Fruit and Vegetable Sector of the Eu
Warsaw, P., S. Archambault, A. He, Stacy Miller	2021	The economic, social, and environmental impacts of farmers markets: Recent evidence from the US
Watts, D.C.H., B. Ilbery, D. Maye	2017	Making reconnections in agro-food geography: alternative systems of food provision