

Proceeding Paper

Consumers' Trust and Preferences Regarding Local Plant Varieties and Indigenous Farm Animal Breeds in Western Macedonia, Greece [†]

Dimitrios Kyriazoglou ¹, Vasiliki Makri ¹, Martha Tampaki ¹, Katerina Melfou ¹ , Athanasios Ragkos ² and Ioannis A. Giantsis ^{1,*} 

¹ Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of Western Macedonia, 53100 Florina, Greece; kyriazog@yahoo.gr (D.K.); makrivasil@bio.auth.gr (V.M.); tampakimarta@gmail.com (M.T.); kmelfou@uowm.gr (K.M.)

² Agricultural Economics Research Institute, Hellenic Agricultural Organization—DIMITRA, 11528 Athens, Greece; ragkos@elgo.gr

* Correspondence: igiantsis@uowm.gr

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Abstract: The value of rearing indigenous animal breeds and cultivating local plant varieties is extremely high in terms of regional economy and heritage preservation. The purpose of the present research was to investigate the preferences and opinions of consumers in Western Macedonia regarding local varieties and indigenous breeds. For this purpose, an appropriate questionnaire was designed and distributed to a sample of 80 consumers from Western Macedonia. The questions combined the demographic, psychographic and institutional characteristics of consumers. According to our findings, most participants recognize the importance of the conservation of indigenous animal breeds and local plant varieties as well as the products derived from them. Additionally, a large percentage showed a preference for these products for the purpose of supporting the local economy. Nevertheless, particularly for indigenous animal breeds, despite the recognition of their high value and need for conservation, only a small proportion of the participants could name some of the indigenous breeds correctly. Conversely, this was not observed concerning local plant varieties, of which participants were more aware. Thus, better promotion and overall better marketing could enhance the recognition of these resources, emphasizing their high value.

Keywords: indigenous animals; local plants; Western Macedonia; consumer preference



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1. Introduction

Biodiversity is the measurement of genetic variation, species diversity and ecosystem diversity levels [1]. According to Sahney et al. [2], biodiversity is divided into four levels: (a) taxonomic diversity (usually measured at the level of species diversity), (b) ecological diversity (the level of ecosystem diversity), (c) morphological diversity (genetic diversity and molecular diversity) and (d) functional diversity (which is a measure of the number of functionally different species in a population). Greece includes 6600 species and subspecies of angiosperm plants and more than 23,000 species of terrestrial and freshwater animals. The breeding of indigenous animals and the cultivation of local plants are inextricably linked to the social and economic life of each region. Native products are very important for the diet as well as the economy of a region. The agricultural sector is an important economic activity for the region of Western Macedonia. The purpose of this study was to investigate the preference and opinion of consumers regarding local products derived from indigenous livestock breeds and local plant varieties in the region of Western Macedonia.

2. Materials and Methods

Research was carried out using questionnaires ($N = 80$). The questionnaires included sections about (a) demographic characteristics, (b) psychographic characteristics and (c) institutional characteristics of the consumers. The above sections were created with the aim to investigate the knowledge level concerning the breeding of indigenous animals and the cultivation of local plants. Collected data were categorized using Excel 2010.

3. Results and Discussion

The majority of participants were women, with the largest percentage belonging to the age group 26–44 and the population category of 5.000–20.000 inhabitants per city. In addition, the educational level with the largest percentage was that of higher education followed by high school diploma holders. Furthermore, the largest percentage corresponded to the 801–1500 income per month category. The majority of the participants (90%) recognized the value of local plant varieties and indigenous animal breeds. Buyers were triggered mainly by underlying factors when purchasing a new product. The main reasons for consumers’ preference for local products were (a) contribution to the local economy, (b) reasons of loyalty to employment policies in the local market and (c) saving resources for future generations. In addition, the participants considered local products to be worth their money and wholesome. Also, the majority of participants believed that (a) people should buy local products rather than imported ones and (b) only products that cannot be produced in Greece should be imported. In general, however, the participants did not have basic knowledge regarding the status of indigenous animal breeds and animal-related husbandry, a fact that was not observed in local plant varieties. Menger and Hamm [3] report in their research that the participants possessed little awareness of issues concerning animal diversity and sustainability, the risk of animal breeds’ extinction and conservation. However, in Germany, the biodiversity and conservation of indigenous animals is a specialized sensitive topic [4]. The results of the study by Menger and Hamm [3] showed that conservation plays a key role in the production of native products. According to our results, in agreement with the aforementioned studies from other European countries, the labeling and proper marking of local products would highly benefit the reliable recognition of local resources, of both animal and plant origin (Figure 1).

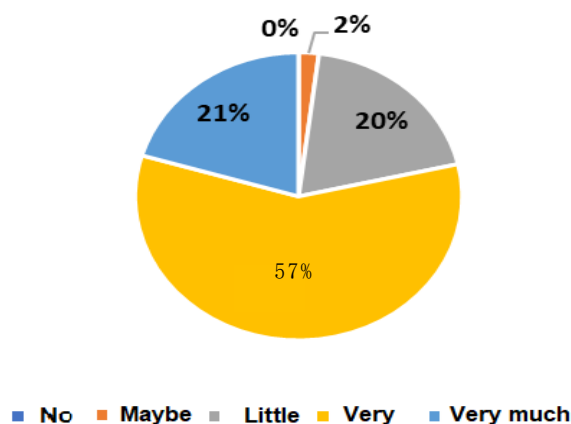


Figure 1. Consumers’ agreement with labeling of local products.

4. Conclusions

The cultivation of local varieties of plants and rearing indigenous animal breeds may contribute significantly to the strengthening of local economy. In addition, it enhances the preservation of local heritage and the conservation of local genetic resources. The region of Western Macedonia is associated with the cultivation of local varieties of plants and the breeding of indigenous animals. Efforts should be conducted to achieve the better and more reliable recognition of these products on the local and global market. Advertising,

public relations and direct sales are among the proposed methods for effective promotion. Marketing can be viewed as an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, delivering and communicating the nutritional value of local products to customers. The organization of events with the purpose of promoting and advertising local products to the wider public is another useful proposal.

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