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MERCHANDIZING AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS BY MEANS OF SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS IN MUREȘ COUNTY

ABSTRACT

Short food supply chains (SFSCs) are a viable alternative to conventional food supply chains, accessible to small-scale farmers. SFSCs hold multiple benefits from the socio-economic, cultural, environmental and health improvement points of view, meeting the farmers' need to reconnect to end-consumers. Firstly, SFSCs contribute to some extent to helping small-scale farmers and processors to sell their agri-food products. Secondly, SFSCs mostly meet the urban population's need to consume minimally processed, healthier and cheaper food.

Located in central Romania, Mureș County, as a result of its soil, topographic and weather conditions, is well known for its wide array of agri-food products, ranging from cereals, industrial crops and medicinal plants to processed food products (bakery and pastry products, frozen/canned fruit and vegetables, sugar, beer, dairy and meat products). Due to its multicultural population, it can be noted that entrepreneurial activity is quite intense and widespread in Mureș County. According to the available statistical data for 2015 from the Harghita Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency, there were 2,000 registered animal and non-animal processing units, located mainly at the outskirts of the towns Târgu-Mureș, Reghin, Luduș, Târnăveni and Sighișoara.

The paper highlights the role and economic activity of small-scale farmers, most of whom still use traditional processing, supplying and selling methods and techniques, specific to SFSCs: sales directly to consumers, on-farm sales, sales on farmers' markets, roadside sales, sales near tourism sites, sales occasioned by food festivals, their own retail outlets, butcher shops, meat processors, bakeries, groceries, milk vending machines, exhibition stands, mobile food carts and on-line shops.

Key words: short food supply chains, agri-food products, Mureș County.

JEL Classification: Q13, Q11, O13, M31.

1. INTRODUCTION

The sale of agri-food products by means of short food supply chains (SFSCs) is currently regarded as a key issue, not having sufficiently benefited from a thorough analysis. Thus, it can be noted that a more comprehensive socio-economic and legal study in the EU member states is needed, in order to improve

the structural, professional and innovative features of the local food system (Kneafsey et al., 2013; Tanasă, 2014, p. 184).

By reviewing the current literature on SFSCs, one can note that a widely accepted official definition of the SFSC/Local Food System concept is not yet available. Thus, uncertainty and confusion arise, especially with regard to the direct sales concept. According to several authors, SFSC/LFSs are widely understood as means of selling agri-food products on a limited intermediary basis, and/or on a limited geographic area, thus shortening the distance between the effective producer and the end consumer as much as possible. It should also be noted that such a low number of intermediaries (links) is not synonymous with the concept of direct sale (nil number of links). Rather, SFSCs are to be understood as means of selling through only one single trade intermediary, e.g. cooperative shops, specialist shops, supermarkets etc. (Marechal, 2008; Aubry & Chiffolleau, 2009, p. 55; Tanasă, 2015a, p. 197). In case the middleman is taken out of the equation, its economic function and role must be taken over by either producer, by means of various management and marketing strategies (e.g. sales directly to consumers, individual retail outlet, on-line stores, sales on farmers' markets, sales occasioned by trade fairs/ food festivals or tourism events etc.) or end consumer (in order to purchase goods the consumer has to travel to the site of production, be it at a farm/ processing unit or producers' shop/farmers' market or other types of markets).

According to the National Rural Development Program for 2014–2020, the *local market* is defined as the trading of food products in a specific circumscribed area, no more than 75 km away from the agricultural holding of origin, taking into account the characteristics of Romania's geographical features.

Given the fact that agriculture in Mureş County is mainly practiced by small scale agricultural holdings, the sale of the harvested agri-food products represents a key issue for local farmers and producers.

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

The SFSC concept is currently a topic of interest at global level, addressed by numerous researchers in rural development, for example Aubry, Chiffolleau, DuPuis, Goodman, Galli, Brunori, Kneafsey, Renting, Marsden, Sage, Roep, Wiskerke and Van der Ploeg. In this respect, one can note that the innovative and effective contribution of SFSCs to the development of rural settlements in the European Union has been, for example, emphasized by the research undertaken by the *Joint Research Center*. JRC's research data were included in the study "Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in the EU. A State of Play of Their Socio-Economic Characteristics" (Kneafsey et al., 2013).

Starting with 2005, researchers' interest in SFSCs gradually started to increase, mainly as a result of the implementation of several research projects under Framework Program 5, such as SUS-CHAIN (www.sus-chain.org). Between 2007 and

2013, research endeavors on the topic were continued by other four Framework Programme 7 type of research projects – FOODLINKS (www.foodlinkscommunity.net), SUPURBFOOD (www.supurbfood.eu), PUREFOOD (www.purefoodnetwork.eu) and GLAMUR (<http://www.glamur.eu>), involving numerous researchers from different EU and non-EU member states. Thus, in recent year, a well-known European institution, the University and Research Center of Wageningen, Holland, has focused on rediscovering, promoting and developing SFSCs, noteworthy being its implementation of several specific projects financed by the European Union (CORDIS http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home_en.html).

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

For the present study, the authors drew on the analysis, processing and interpretation of on-line data and information on local functional processing/selling units active in the agri-food industry promoting the SFSC concept, available at the Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency. The technique of direct observation (“in situ”) has also been used, with a view to make an assessment of the general state of SFSCs in Mureş County. The authors travelled to farmers’ markets or the effective production sites of various economic players in the field of SFSCs, mostly local small-scale farmers.

The collected information was organized by using the classification method. Thus, the different types of food products locally merchandized were divided into distinct categories, according to their specific features in order to get a better overall understanding of the investigated SFSCs. The paper does not address the quantitative aspect, given the fact that quantitative data regarding the trade with agri-food sector products by means of short food supply chains were unfortunately not available. The authors limited themselves to the identification and classification of local producers using SFSCs as merchandizing means.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Due to the peculiar soil, topographic and weather characteristics, the agricultural resources widely vary in Mureş County. Out of the total agricultural land area, the percentage of arable lands widely varies, from 0.1% to 80%, the county average being 54%. While the highest values of 60–80% arable land were found in the Transylvanian Plain (the western half), the lowest ones are found in the north and north-east, representing the mountainous area of Mureş County.

The north-western and western part of the county (the Transylvanian Plain) has the most fertile land areas (soil fertility class II), representing an ideal environment for cereals (corn, wheat, barley and oat) and industrial crops (sugar

beet, potatoe and tobacco), besides annual and perennial fodder crops (clover and alfalfa). The main crop in eastern and north-eastern Mureş County (the Mureş river upper basin) is the potato (e.g. Răstoliţa commune, where about 70% of the total arable lands are annually covered with potato crops). The higher altitude areas provide suitable weather conditions for fruit-tree farming, the Reghin – Breaza – Lunca – Batoş – Fărăgău basin, which is practically reserved for apple-tree growing, being one of the most famous in this respect. Fruit farming is practiced mainly in Apold – Sighişoara – Saschiz area of the county.

Cereal crops cover about 85% of all arable land in Mureş County, maize alone accounting for 55%, due to suitable weather and soil conditions. The largest cultivated areas are located in the Transylvanian Plain and the Mureş River Basin, as well as in the Lower Basin of the Niraj River. The wheat, rye, two-row barley and barley crops are grown on hillside areas, being nevertheless mostly found on plains (the percentage of cereal crops ranges from 25 to 30 % of total arable land in the rural settlements Pogăceaua, Miheu de Câmpie, Şincai, Băla and Răciu). Hop was grown on 178 hectares in Mureş County in 2010, representing over 55.6% of Romania's total hop growing areas, which totalled 320 hectares. The largest hop fields are located in two main regions – Sighişoara (121 hectares) and Saschiz (57 hectares). Beetroot growing is an ancient occupation in the Transylvanian Plain, the extensively cultivated fields of Cuci, Sânpaul, Sângeorgiu de Mureş and Gheorghe Doja communes, near the town of Luduş, standing as evidence to this. Two plants for processing beetroot are currently operating in Luduş.

The Târnavă plateau, especially the area encompassing the Târnaveni, Blaj and Aiud towns, is considered suitable for vine growing (the plateau is also often called the “Târnavă Vineyard”). The plateau is widely known for its extensive growing of noble vines (75.7% of total 1,642 hectares, higher than the national average). The Mureş river basin, especially the area between the town Reghin and Cheţani, is the most developed vegetable farming area in the whole county as a result of its soil and weather conditions suitable for cold crop vegetable growing (cabbage, onion, cucumbers) and its proximity to urban centers where almost all the production is sold.

An estimated 44% of the total agricultural area is covered by pastures and meadows, expanding in the eastern and north-eastern parts of the county, which are marked by the presence of brown soils (fertility class V). Animal husbandry is still another ancient occupation in Mureş County. The livestock herds on agricultural holdings consist of cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry. The cattle are present throughout the entire county area, the dairy cows totalling 39,261 heads in 2010. Cattle are commonly raised on small-scale agricultural holdings. Larger farms of more than 500 cattle are found around Reghin and Târnaveni. There are few rural settlements where more than 1000 dairy cows are raised, including Sărmaşu, Band and Vătava. Sheep are also widely found in Mureş county, representing 4% of Romania's total livestock. There are several rural settlements with more than 8,000 sheep, i.e. Sărmaşu, Albeşti, Band, Iclanzel, Sânpetru de Câmpie and Vânători.

The land areas under medicinal, aromatic and spice crops are located in the proximity of Reghin (74 hectares) and the surroundings of Sârmaşu (7 hectares). Two small-scale plants were established in the village Eremitu (*Vita Plant Ltd*) and Sovata (*Larix Com Impex Ltd*) respectively, for the processing and manufacturing of teas. Wild fruit harvesting (cranberries, raspberries, blackberries, boxthorn etc) and forest mushroom foraging (boletus, golden chanterelle/girolle, orange agaric, honey agaric etc) from the spontaneous flora are commonly practiced in the mountainous and hillside areas of the county. Noteworthy examples are boxthorn and raspberry crops and the numerous protected mushroom crops (*Champignon* and *Pleurotus*).

Bee keeping is also an ancient occupation in Mureş County, practiced by small-scale sole traders, operating as authorized individuals or individual enterprises. A large number of individuals practice migratory bee keeping throughout the year. The extensive practice of apiculture is largely helped by the rich spontaneous flora, as well as by the extensive melliferous crop fields (sunflower, rapeseed, clover, fruit trees etc). In 2010, beekeepers owned more than 50,000 bee families. Târnaveni, Ghibed, Fântânele, Ghindari and Pogăceaua, with their large numbers of bee families – over 2,000, are just some of the villages with a long tradition in apiculture.

Fish farming is practiced in the lakes and ponds of the Transylvanian plain. With a total area of 589 hectares, most fish farms are located in the Luduş River Valley (e.g. the villages Miheşu de Câmpie, Zau de Câmpie, Tăureni, Şăulia, Sânger), the Mureş River Valley (e.g. Iernut) and also the Noroiăşi River Valley (e.g. Glodeni and Fărăgău). In the river valleys of the western sub-mountainous areas, salmon aquaculture is practiced mainly by the inhabitants of the Gurghiu and Niraj River Valleys (Lăpuşna and Câmpu Cetăţii). Most of the fish catch is merchandized either in urban settlements (e.g. “Păstrăvăria Bistra Mureşului”, a (trout) fishery located in Cuza Vodă Square in the town Târgu Mureş) or on-farm (e.g. “Hanul Pescăresc”/“Halászsárda”, in the commune Câmpu Cetăţii).

The favorable weather conditions in 2014 and the suitable agricultural technologies used in Mureş County resulted in vegetable crops harvests (kilograms per hectare of harvested land) close to those at the national level, in several cases above the national average. The crops generating high yields include vegetables (tomatoes – 16,372 kg/ha, onions – 15,672 kg/ha and green peppers – 14,165 kg/ha), cereals (wheat – 3,984 kg/ha, sunflower – 2,264 kg/ha) and fodder. All these harvested crops were 30% higher than the national average yield (National Institute for Statistics – TEMPO Online 2015).

Several professional producer associations operate at Mureş County level:

– “*The Knights of Palinka in Transylvania*” (“Asociația Cavalerilor de Pălincă din Transilvania”) – established in 2015 and consisting of 12 producers of “palinka” (a type of strong fruit brandy) from the Sînsimion area, all centered around the “Orban Distilleries” – a family-owned fruit distillery business;

– “*The Agricultural Cooperative for Székely Produce*” (“Cooperativa Agricolă Produs Secuiesc”/“Szekely Termek”), based in Miercurea-Ciuc, Harghita County, also markets and represents the interests of local small farmers (mainly

pastry and bakery producers, beekeepers, dairy producers, suppliers of meat products and meat specialities) and artisans activating in the adjacent Mureş and Covasna Counties (<http://www.szekelytermek.ro>);

– “*The ADEPT Foundation*” – *Transylvania branch* (“*Fundația ADEPT-Transilvania*”) – founded in 2004 and based in the Saschiz commune, its main goal being fostering biodiversity in Transylvania, with a focus on the Sighișoara – Târnava Mare area, by aiding local communities in the process of merchandizing local agri-food sector products, as well as by obtaining benefits as a result of preserving natural landscapes. Starting with 2007, the foundation initiated several projects meant to assist local rural communities: the establishment of the *Tourism Information Center* and “*Târnava Mare Tourism Association*”; the development and on-the-ground marking of tourist tracks; the counselling of local entrepreneurs in accessing EU funding (agri-environmental schemes); the development and establishment of farmers’ markets merchandizing locally grown products, as well as programs seeking to raise awareness of environmental issues. “*The Adept Foundation*” especially focuses on encouraging local entrepreneurs to start businesses in the field of organic agriculture and in the agro-tourism sector, mainly by providing services. The foundation also encourages the setting up of producer associations (cooperatives) and it established several collective milk-processing units, with the aim of better marketing locally grown/obtained products and cutting down of expenses. Moreover, “*Adept*” has developed on its own a quality assurance and certification scheme for food products, designed especially to help associated producers who makes use of collective milk processing units comply with sanitary and veterinary norms. In the context of its endeavors to help the marketing of local food products, the organization has contributed to launching a series of farmers’ festivals/trade fairs in the capital city Bucharest as well as in other cities throughout the country, which have effectively succeeded in merchandizing produce directly to buyers. On the other hand, they also represented opportunities for setting up links between agri-food sector producers and “*HoReCa*” entrepreneurs. Last but not least, the “*Adept Foundation*” helped to start “*Slow Food Sighișoara*” – a movement striving to reunite consumers (e.g. hotels and restaurants) to farmers and local producers. A wide range of products are currently registered under the brand “*The Ark of Slow Food Taste*”.

It is worth mentioning that the food industry in Mureş County was well established ever since the interwar period. At the time, there were three mills, a milk and dairy processing unit, a vegetable oil processing plant, four medicinal alcohol plants, a brewery, one meat products & meat specialties producer, a chocolate & candy factory, a sugar refinery as well as a vinegar factory (“*Portretul României interbelice – județul Mureş*”, 2015).

By analyzing the present situation in Mureş County, one can note that local producers are not only present at local level, but are also economically involved on a regional and national scale, showing a developed sense of entrepreneurship. The presence of new associative forms between local producers and traditional processors and suppliers specific to short food supply chains can be noted.

According to statistical data available for 2015 from the Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency, out of 1,990 officially registered economic operators, 1,646 were local processing units delivering food products of animal origin, while 344 units were specialized in the processing/vending of products of non-animal origin. Most of the commercially active units in the food retail sector are using selling methods and practices specific to SFSCs.

Out of the 1,646 local units delivering food products of animal origin, 8 are butchers, 19 meat & meat specialty suppliers, 189 on-farm milk processing plants, 4 off-farm processing plants, 30 raw milk vending machines, 1 fishing vessel, 6 aquafarms, 13 fisheries, 1 center specialized in extracting, collecting and supply of honeybee, wax and other similar products, 10 beehives, 4 honey and honeybee derivatives shop; 189 are restaurants/fast-foods/bars/fast-food trailers/grills/food stands; 68 pizza shops, 139 canteens, 59 pastry & bakery shops, 2 pastry shops, 29 tourist accommodation units, 2 on-line groceries, 117 food carts/stand vendors and 7 catering units.

As for the 344 units specialized in the processing/selling products of non-animal origin, according to data from the same agency in Mureş County, there are 38 bread makers, 74 confectioners, 33 grain-millers, 4 pastry shops (biscuits, pretzels, sweet biscuits etc.), 11 fruit and vegetable processing plants, 5 small-scale organic juice manufacturers (fruit & vegetables), 6 small-scale refineries for edible oils, 2 sugar beet refineries, 4 chocolate and cocoa/chocolate based candy factories, 1 small-scale pasta factory, 1 small-scale spices processing plant, 2 small-scale tea and coffee processing plants, 4 processors of various food-products, 9 distilleries/ethanol plants, 7 wineries and wine suppliers, 2 breweries, 5 ice-cream micro-factories, 1 spring water bottling plant, 19 still-water bottling plants, 5 silos used for bulk storage of grain, 8 fruit and vegetable storage facilities (wild fruit included), 11 produce packaging/bottling units, 1 frozen foods plant and 14 commercial mushroom growers (www.ansvsa.ro, 2015).

Meat industry is another well established segment of the food-products industry in Mureş County, given the number of slaughterhouses, considerable number of grocery stores (butchers, meat & meat specialties suppliers, deli shops etc.) and small-scale subsistence agricultural holdings constantly collaborating with well-known producers in the area. In the animal husbandry sector, sheep farming is a significant industry. The interests of sheep farmers are represented by several associations such as the “Sâncrăiana Sheep and Goat Raisers’ Association”, “Ardeleana de Mureş Sheep and Goat Raisers’ Association”, “Târnavale – Sighișoara Sheep and Goat Raisers’ Association”, and “Mount Bekecs Sheep and Goat Raisers’ Association”, the latter being the only organization in the county affiliated to the “*The Mountain Shepherders’ Federation*” (“Federația Oierilor de Munte”).

In the context of the marketing and branding promotion practiced in Mureş County, “Primacom Ltd” (*Petry* trademark) has good market visibility (Table 1), owning more than 20 quite attractive and well-supplied retail stores mainly located in areas with high trading potential/pedestrian traffic – city centers and farmers’ markets. While some butchers and butcher shops (e.g. “Agro Prod Com Dosa” Ltd.,

“Ponderosa” Ltd., “Carnicomp” Ltd., “Maris Prod Carm” Ltd., “Mix Vas” Ltd. Etc.), specific to SFSCs are located in the vicinity of farmers’ markets in several towns/cities, others merchandize their products through retail outlets at the firms headquarters (e.g. “Tordai Impex” Ltd., “Ponderosa Ltd.” and “Ferma Mureni” Ltd.).

Table 1

List of meat and meat products suppliers in Mureş County involved in short food supply chains

No	Producer's/retailer's name	Place of production/producer or retailer	Range of produce/Types of SFSCs
1	<i>Primacom Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş, Sovata, Reghin, Luduş, Miercurea Nirajului, Sângeorgiu de Mureş, Cristeşti	<i>Petry</i> brand meat and meat specialties, own retail chain in Mureş, Harghita and Cluj, as well as two food carts (http://www.petry.ro)
2	<i>Tordai Impex Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	meat and meat products, own slaughterhouse and retail outlet
3	<i>Ponderosa Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	meat and meat products, slaughterhouse and also three shops in Târgu-Mureş
4	<i>Ferma Mureni Ltd.</i>	Mureni	fresh beef and meat products, butcher's shop located on farm
5	<i>Authentic Meat Ltd.</i>	Sighişoara, Reghin	meat and meat products (own retail shop chain (" <i>Delicacies from the Székely Land</i> ")/ <i>Székelyfalat</i>)
6	<i>Cazadela Ltd.</i>	Reghin	meat and meat products, own butcher's shop and 5 privately owned shops located in Reghin
7	<i>Agro Prod Com Dosa Ltd.</i>	Chibed	meat and meat products, slaughterhouse, 5 privately owned shops open in Chibed, Târgu-Mureş, Miercurea Nirajului and Sângeorgiu de Pădure, two food carts in Chibed
8	<i>Ana Bianca Ltd.</i>	Târnăveni	meat and meat products, own butcher's shop; the main supplier of the Municipal Hospital in Târnăveni
9	<i>Mix Vas Ltd.</i>	Sângeorgiu de Pădure, Fântânele	meat and meat products, own butcher's shop, four privately owned shops open in Sângeorgiu de Pădure and Fântânele as well as a food cart
10	<i>S.C Prodimpex Monica Ltd.</i>	Reghin	meat and traditional meat products <i>under the brand Miro</i> , owns 3 shops
11	<i>Maris Prod Carm Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	Small-scale meat processing unit, delivering traditional finished goods under the <i>Maris brand</i> . Owns six shops in Târgu-Mureş (http://www.marisprod.ro)
12	<i>Cesiro PLC</i>	Sighişoara	meat and meat products, butcher's, owns 2 shops open in Sighişoara
13	<i>Carnicomp Ltd.</i>	Sighişoara	meat and meat products, distributed locally, owns four shops in Sighişoara

Source: own elaboration based on Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency database (DSVSA Mureş)

Furthermore, numerous partnerships between various local producers who are economically active in different sectors of the food industry are worth mentioning. Some examples of good practices are “Primacom Ltd.”, a merchandizer of meat and meat specialties under the brand *Petry*, which uses its own retail chain stores, “Therezia Prodcom Ltd” (*Therezia brand*), a dairy producer, as well as the partnership between “Agro Prod Com Dosa Ltd”, “Therezia Prodcom” Ltd. and “Eldi Bakery” Ltd., which has resulted in the opening of a grocery store specialized in selling meat, dairy and bakery products. “Agro Prod Com Dosa Ltd”, “Therezia Prodcom Ltd” and “Eldi Bakery Ltd” make use of mobile food carts/trucks as a method of direct selling. At food festivals/trade fairs or other types of gastronomic events, most local producers’ exhibit stands for trading.

It can be noted that producers from other counties operate businesses on the local market of Mureş County, for example “Authentic Meat Ltd”, headquartered in Gheorgheni – Harghita (“*Delicacies from the Székely Land*” brand), owning several retail outlets in the towns Reghin and Sighişoara. Another example is the family-owned business “Bebeşelea-Sterp Elena” from Mărginimea Sibiului (*Sibiu County*), selling dairy and traditional meat specialties by means of its 2 retail outlets located in Târgu-Mureş.

The milk and dairy industry sector is quite large, since important economic operators such as *FrieslandCampina* (a Dutch dairy cooperative) and *Hochland* (Hochland Group – Germany) operate businesses in Mureş County; these however are beyond the scope of the present study, given the fact that they are large international enterprises. An important local producer is “Indlacto Mureş Ltd.”, one of the largest mozzarella producers in Romania (30 tons per day), which has entered into several partnerships with various supermarket chains and HoReCa members in Romania. Another significant local producer is “Therezia Prodcom Ltd”, owner of the brand *Therezia*. The firm owns 5 retail outlets located on farmers’ markets in Târgu-Mureş, Sângeorgiu de Pădure and Band, but it also merchandises its products directly at its *Pănet* farm or alongside other products, in partner’s *Petry* shops (Table 2).

Table 2

List of milk and dairy products suppliers in Mureş County involved in short food supply chains

No	Producer’s/retailer’s name	Place of production/producer or retailer	Range of produce/Types of SFSCs
1	<i>Therezia Prodcom Ltd.</i>	Pănet	dairy products (traditional ones included) under the brand <i>Therezia</i> ; owns several shops (5 in Târgu-Mureş – located in/near farmers’ markets, and also in Pănet, Sângeorgiu de Pădure and Band); enterprise <i>Therezia</i> also markets its products in partner shops <i>Petry</i>) (http://therezia.ro)
2	<i>Sanlacta PLC</i>	Sântana de Mureş	<i>Sanlacta</i> dairy products, distributed locally and regionally (http://www.sanlacta.ro)

Table 2 (continued)

3	<i>Indlacto Mures Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	large Romanian <i>mozzarella</i> producer—approximately 30 tons per day (http://www.indlacto.ro)
4	<i>Mirdatod Ltd.</i>	Ibăneşti, Târgu-Mureş	traditional dairy products, popularly known as “ <i>being from Ibăneşti</i> ” (e.g. farmer cheese, sheep milk cheese, pressed cheese, cheese curd and pot cheese ş.a.m.d), owns 2 shops in farmers’ markets in Târgu-Mureş (http://mirdatod.ro)
5	<i>Panem Ltd.</i>	Luduş	owns a milk processing unit; the seller also markets milk by means of three milk vending machines in Luduş.
6	<i>Heliantus Prod Ltd.</i>	Reghin	owns a milk processing unit; the producer relies on distribution networks
7	<i>Lacto Muntean Ltd.</i>	Teaca, jud. Bistriţa	owns a milk processing and packaging plant; <i>Sinelli</i> dairy brand products are sold in eight privately owned shops in Târgu-Mureş, Reghin and Sighişoara (http://www.lactatebistrita.ro/)
8	<i>Burdeţ Viorel</i> (sole trader)	Târgu-Mureş	Raw milk seller by means of five milk vending machines located in farmers’ markets in Târgu-Mureş.
9	<i>Hanna Tiinde Katalin</i> (individual business)	Târgu-Mureş, Miercurea Nirajului	Agricultural holding involved in raising dairy cows. It sells milk by means of three vending machines.
10	<i>Cordoş Vasile Ioan</i> (sole trader)	Şincai	owner of the “ <i>Şincai</i> ” agricultural holding; sells raw milk by means of two vending machines in Târgu-Mureş

Source: own elaboration based on Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency database (DSVSA Mureş)

“Sannlacta PLC”, located in Sântana de Mureş, produces milk and dairy products which are marketed in grocery stores and local supermarkets. Another noteworthy entrepreneur is “Mirdatod Ltd” from the commune Ibăneşti, the seller of famous traditional dairy products (commonly branded as “*from Ibăneşti*”) such as farmer cheese, ewe milk cheese, pressed cheese, cheese curd and pot cheese among others. The company owns two shops located on the farmers’ markets in the county seat (Târgu Mureş). “Panel Ltd” and “Heliantus Ltd”, two Reghin-based units for dairy cows milk collecting and processing, merchandise their products through partner grocery shops and also by means of raw milk vending machines in Luduş. In 2015, 16 small-scale agricultural holdings operating in the animal husbandry business (sole traders and individual businesses) have merchandised raw milk directly to end consumers by means of milk vending machines. The agri-food producers from the neighbouring counties, such as “Lacto Muntean Ltd” (owner of the “*Sinelli*” trademark) operate eight retail outlets in Târgu-Mureş, Reghin and Sighişoara.

One important sector of agriculture is aquaculture. Several local entrepreneurs are involved in the business, merchandising harvested fish in dedicated shops mainly located in urban centers (e.g. “The Bistra Mureşului Troutery” and “My fish shop”, both in Târgu-Mureş). Other fisheries sell their merchandise on-farm, e.g. The “Halászcsárda” Inn and Fishery, located in the village Câmpu Cetăţii. Moreover, apart from raising and harvesting fish, some entrepreneurs provide the potential customers with the opportunity to practice recreational fishing on the “Glodeni” and “Bezid” fish farms. The Luduş River Valley (e.g. the villages Miheşu de Câmpie, Zau de Câmpie, Tăureni, Şăulia, Sânger), the Mureş River Valley (e.g. Iernut) as well as the Noroiaşi River Valley (e.g. the villages Glodeni, Fărăgău) have a significant aquaculture potential, given the number of artificial lakes present in the area (see Table 3).

Table 3

List of fish aquaculture farmers and fish products sellers in Mureş County involved in short food supply chains

No	Producer's/retailer's name	Place of production/producer or retailer	Range of produce/Types of SFSCs
1	<i>Păstrăvăria Bistra Ltd.</i>	Bistra Mureşului	Family business specialised in selling fresh fish (trout) on farm and at its fishery/fish shop in Târgu-Mureş.
2	<i>Magazinul Meu de Peşte Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	Merchandises fresh and refrigerated fish in its shop open in the 7th of November Square in Târgu-Mureş. (http://www.magazinulmeudepeste.ro)
3	<i>Salmo Impex Ltd., Han Pescăresc/ "Halaszcsarda"</i>	Câmpu Cetăţii	Merchandises fish and fish products at its privately owned Inn & Fishery. The entrepreneur offers customers the possibility of practicing recreational fishing.
4	<i>Aquafarm Terana Ltd.</i>	Glodeni	Manages the fish farm at Glodeni. Recreational fishing can be practiced by potential customers. (http://www.piscicolaglodeni.ro).
5	<i>R.N.P. ROMSILVA – DIR. SILVICĂ MUREŞ</i> (National Forest Administration “Romsilva” – Mureş Branch)	Lăpuşna, Stânceni	Manages 2 fish farms in Lăpuşna and Stânceni and sells fresh salmon.
6	<i>A.V.P.S. Turul</i> (Association of Hunters and Sports Fishermen “Turul”)	Târgu-Mureş	Owner of the “Lake Bezid” aquafarm. Recreational fishing can be practiced by potential customers.

Source: own elaboration based on Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency database (DSVSA Mureş)

The apicultural industry (honeybee and other beehive products) is an important asset of Mureş County, as represented by “Apiprodex Ltd” and “Apicola Ltd”, which process the production of local small-scale beekeepers. Most apiarists operate legally as sole proprietorships or individual businesses (Table 4).

Table 4

List of beekeepers and honeybee derivatives sellers in Mureş County involved in short food supply chains

No	Producer's/retailer's name	Place of production/producer or retailer	Range of produce/Types of SFSCs
1	<i>Stupina Finna</i> (family business)	Glăjărie	Family-owned business specialized in the production of honeybee and honeybee derivatives. The family sells most of its products locally and owns a shop in the County Capital of Târgu Mureş.
2	<i>Milăşan Teodor</i> (individual business)	Cristuru Secuiesc	It merchandises honey and derivatives by means of an on-line shop. (http://mieredealbine-ro.webnode.ro)
3	<i>Apicola Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş, Luduş, Reghin	The firm owns several retail outlets for the sale of honey and derivatives.
4	<i>Apiprodex Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	Seller of certified organic honey and derivatives (http://apiprodex.eu). The largest part of its production is exported.

Source: own elaboration based on Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency database (DSVSA Mureş)

“Apicola Ltd” owns several retail outlets by which it sells its state certified honeybee and other beehive products, while the second most important organic honeybee seller, “Apiprodex Ltd”, which owes its quality production to 120 small-scale partner beekeepers based in Mureş and in the adjacent counties, exports most of its certified production. Many sole traders in the beekeeping industry (e.g. the Milăşan Family) merchandise their products by means of farmers’ markets, relatives and acquaintances, alongside important roadways and tourist routes (e.g. Sovata and Câmpu Cetăţii), in the period June-September. Local apiarists also take part in traditional food festivals, gastronomic events or artisans’ festivals organized in Mureş or neighboring counties.

Confectioneries are frequently present in major cities like Târgu-Mureş, Reghin, Sovata and Luduş (Table 5). Pastry products are often sold by means of privately owned retail shops located in areas with a strong commercial potential (city centers and supermarkets). Special orders can be made by phone or via on-line (e.g. the recently registered “Sanda Delights Ltd” and “Rose Confectionery Ltd”). Judging solely by the number of retail outlets opened, we consider that the most important businesses are “The Egret Ltd” (6 shops in Târgu-Mureş), “Angela’s Ltd” (3 shops in Târgu-Mureş), “Sanda Delights Ltd” (a shop in Corunca), “Dactylis Prod Ltd” (a shop in Luduş). As a rule, the store section of small-scale confectioners is located next to the manufacturing section. In the context of the sweets industry, an

important sector comprises the numerous ice cream trailers spread around city centers or in areas frequented by local residents and tourists. Given the size of its ice cream manufacturing unit in Sântana de Mureş, “Gelateria da Michele Ltd” is a locally well-known entrepreneur.

Table 5

List of bakeries and confectioneries in Mureş County involved in short food supply chains

No	Producer's/retailer's name	Place of production/producer or retailer	Range of produce/Types of SFSCs
1	<i>Sanda Delights Ltd.</i>	Corunca	Confectionery who owns an on-line shop dedicated to local residents (http://sandadelights.ro)
2	<i>Egreta Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	Owns a confectionery and six sweet shops in Târgu-Mureş. (http://cofetariaegreta.ro)
3	<i>Dactylis Prod Ltd.</i>	Luduş	Confectionery (<i>Tiramisu</i> sweet shop in Luduş), bakery and owner of an ice cream producing unit. The producer also sells pasta, pastry and bakery, besides ice cream (http://dactylis.ro)
4	<i>Granada Prodcom Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	Confectionery (“ <i>Marzipan</i> ” sweet shop Târgu-Mureş)
5	<i>Xenia Info Ltd.</i>	Luduş	Confectionery and pastry shop
6	<i>Cofetăria Artizan Ltd.</i>	Sântana de Mures/ Târgu-Mureş	Confectionery (in Sântana de Mures) and pastry/sweet shop (Târgu-Mureş) (http://www.cofetaria-artizan.ro)
7	<i>La Angela Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	Confectionery and restaurant (http://cofetaria-angela.ro); it manages three sweet shops
8	<i>Carmaco Silva Ltd.</i>	Reghin	Confectionery owning one sweet shop in Reghin (www.carmaco.ro)
9	<i>Gelateria Da Michele Ltd.</i>	Sântana de Mureş	It is an ice cream producing unit in <i>Sântana de Mureş</i> .
10	<i>Cofetăria Trandafirul Ltd.</i>	Sângeorgiu de Mureş, Târgu-Mureş	Confectionery and sweet shop opened in Târgu-Mureş. It also manages an online shop. (http://cofetariatrandafirulsitezaur.greenelite.cc)

Source: own elaboration based on Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency database (DSVSA Mureş)

The pastry and bakery industry is quite developed in Mureş County, considering the registered economic operators that are currently active – 33 grain-millers, 74 bakeries/pastry and 71 pastry units, according to data available for 2015 from the Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency. Most of these businesses merchandise their products locally. While mills and bakeries have a relatively uniform spread across the territory of Mureş County, pastry shops, pretzel shops, pie and doughnut sellers are rarely seen outside city centers, farmers’ markets, transit hubs or large shopping centers. Large bakeries operate shops near or on farmers’ markets in the county capital of Târgu-Mureş, for example “Eldi Bakery Ltd.” – 40 retail outlets including mobile trailers and “Timko Brut Ltd” – 38 retail outlets. Other important producers are the “Kovacks Bakery” (“Home-baked Bread Ltd”) and “Dona Bakery” (<Kemer Dona Impex Ltd.>). The small-scale artisan

bakeries are also of particular importance, merchandising products such as home-baked bread (wood ovens), “crackling crust” bread or potato bread, also known as Székely bread. To name a few – “Hegybeli Mihai” (sole proprietorship), “Szász Béla Ileana” (individual business), “Multibrut Tradițional Ltd.” and “Brutăria Cetate Ltd” As in other cases, the owners manages their shops located right next to their bakeries (Table 6).

Table 6

Producers in the bakery industry in Mureş County involved in short food supply chains

No	Producer's/retailer's name	Place of production/ producer or retailer	Range of produce/Types of SFSCs
1	<i>Eldi Bakery Ltd.</i>	Agrişteu	Multiple bakery units and chain store (over 40), including food carts (www.eldi.ro)
2	<i>Szász Béla Ileana</i> (family business)	Sighişoara	Seller of traditional oven baked bread (wood fired)
3	<i>Brutăria Cetate Ltd.</i>	Sighişoara	Seller of traditional oven (wood fired) baked potato bread
4	<i>Bucur D. Alin</i> (individual business)	Târgu Mureş	Croutons and breadcrumbs (http://pesmet-bucur.ro/index.php?page=pesmet-de-bucur-despre-noi)
5	<i>Hegybeli Mihai</i> (individual business)	Boiu	Potato bread, pastry and sweet specialties producer and seller
6	<i>Fejér Károly</i> (sole trader)	Târgu Mureş	Baker of “chimney cake”/ kúrtöskolács, sells mostly at trade fairs and festivals
7	<i>Multibrut Tradițional PLC</i>	Suseni	Traditional bakery and pastry produce maker – stuffed cake “ <i>from Suseni</i> ”, oven baked bread “ <i>bătută de Suseni</i> ” (traditional recipe)
8	<i>Mokri Com Ltd.</i>	Albeşti	Producer of ice cream cones (waffle cones, sugar cone and vafer cone) (http://www.mokri.ro/index.php)
9	<i>Barabás Rózália</i> (individual business)	Sângiorgiu de Pădure	Producer of saltline crackers (seasoned with garlic, fennel seeds, cheese or sesame), under the brand “Rozi Ropi”. As of 2012, the previously mentioned baker bears the right to market three of its products under the label “ <i>Székely Products</i> ” (http://www.szekelytermek.ro/?l=ro&m=barabas-rozalia-i-i)

Source: own elaboration based on Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency database (DSVSA Mureş)

Other entrepreneurs on the local market are experienced bakers from neighboring or other distant counties, such as “La Casa Pane” from Cluj-Napoca (Cluj County), which operates three shops in Târgu-Mureş, “Diószegi” from Sfântu-Gheorghe (Harghita County), and “Petru” from Piatra-Neamţ (Neamţ County), which operates 4 franchise stores in Târgu-Mureş.

Mobile trailers selling chimney cake or “kürtöskolács” are of particular importance in the local baking and pastry industry, considering the large number of registered individuals operating them, as well as the popularity of the product, well-known across Romania. They can be frequently seen, as in the case of other producers, in city centers. They are also constant participants at food festivals/gastronomic events and other occasional festivals. “Csabys” (family business), “Himi Humi Ltd”, “Ferika Ltd”, “Kiss Ae Istvan” (family business), “Cozomania Ltd”, “Czine Anna” (sole proprietorship), “Nofarosa Ltd”, “Ficzi Alexandru” (sole proprietorship) are the names of just a few entrepreneurs.

Other small-scale bakers are “Bucur D. Alin” (family business) – specialized in selling traditional breadcrumbs and croutons, and “Barabás Rózália” (individual business), producer of saltline crackers (seasoned with garlic, fennel seeds, cheese or sesame), under the brand “*Rozi Ropi*”. As of 2012, the previously mentioned baker bears the right to market its products under the label “*Székely Termek*” (“*Székely Termek*” – *Agricultural Cooperative for Székely Produce*).

In the fruit tree-growing sector, “Hortipomicola Reghin Ltd” is an example of agricultural holding group wholesaling fruit and organic apple juice, consisting of three stand-alone companies and several individual producers, owners of orchards on about 378 hectares. The group relies on facilities capable of storing harvests up to 365 days/year, sorting, grading and packing equipment for apples. Thus, “Hortipomicola Reghin Ltd” manages to wholesale its production all year long, diminishing losses considerably. The producer’s main client is the “*Selgros Cash & Carry*” store chain. Equally important, the Reghin based producer is a supplier of the state, as part of the state-funded program providing fruits for schoolchildren. One associated group member, “Sucmeron Ltd”, buys a part of its harvested apples from local farmers and then processes them to obtain organic juice which is sold wholesale (Table 7).

Table 7

List of units producing, processing and merchandising fruit, fruit juices, stewed fruits, jams, marmelade, fruit preserves, canned vegetables, in Mureş County involved in short food supply chains

No	Producer’s/retailer’s name	Place of production/producer or retailer	Range of produce/Types of SFSCs
1	<i>Grupul de producători agricoli Hortipomicola Reghin Ltd.</i>	Reghin	Agricultural holding group specialised in fruit tree growing and processing harvested fruit. The group comprising three companies and several individual producers, owners of orchards, wholesales fruit and packaged apple juice.
2	<i>Sucmeron Ltd.</i>	Reghin	Plant producing organic apple juice as well as concentrated apple juice. The plant processes harvests from orchards located in Reghin, Socol and Uila. The producers’ main partner is Parmalact LPC. (http://www.sucmerom.ro/)

Table 7 (continued)

3	<i>Dulceața lu' Răzvan Ltd.</i>	Idicel-Pădure	A business started by a young entrepreneur from Cluj-Napoca, specialised in jam production. Most of its range of jams are sold primarily by means of its on-line shop and small pancake shop (" <i>Răzvănărie</i> ") located in Cluj City. http://dulceatalurazvan.ro/produse/
4	<i>Ferma Ecologică Țopa</i> (family business)	Albești	Certified organic farm merchandising dairy, vegetable, dried herbs for tea making, as well as several traditional recipe based products (jams, jellies, prickles, syrups); the farm is also involved in agro-tourism (farmstay). (https://www.facebook.com/Ferma-Ecologica-Topa-190312117695398/timeline/)
5	<i>Casa de pe Deal Ltd.</i>	Saschiz	Family business delivering preserved fruit & vegetables (jams, jellies, syrups, bottled prickles based on traditional german recipes). The family business also markets its products via its on-line shop. (http://www.casadepedeal.com)
6	<i>Ecofruct Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureș	Producer of certified organic dried & frozen foods (mushrooms, fruit, forest fruits, ramsons). (www.ecofruct.eu)
7	<i>Agrosprint Ltd.</i>	Breaza	The firm is basically a subsidiary of a family farm business based in Hungary. It specialises in freezing and packaging fruit and vegetables. (www.agrosprint.hu/index_ro.php)
8	<i>Tămășan Emil</i> (individual business)	Uila	Seller of jams, jellies and stewed fruit based on traditional recipes
9	<i>Transylvania Food Company Ltd.</i>	Saschiz	Business enterprise specializing in syrup, jam and honey selling. Its products are sold under the brand " <i>Grandmother's Cellar</i> " by means of distributors in several counties of Romania. The firm also owns a retail outlet. (www.pivnitabunicii.ro)

Source: own elaboration based on Mureș Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency database (DSVSA Mureș)

Overall, the fruit and vegetable market attracts numerous farmers. "The Țopa Organic Farm" in Albești, for instance, besides marketing raw fruit and vegetables, dairy and tea products, also gets specialized in delivering traditional agri-food products like jam, marmalade, syrups and prickles. The farm is the sole constant supplier of the only *BioCoop store* in Romania, open in the town Sibiu, a franchise of the French *BioCoop* chain.

Other small-scale canned fruit and vegetable producers, such as "The House on the Hill Ltd" (from the village Saschiz), "Grandmother's Cellar" ("Transylvania Food Company Ltd" also from Saschiz) and "Răzvan's Jam" (from the village

Idicel-Pădure) are popular local brands, sellers of products based on traditional recipes. These entrepreneurs have also opened on-line stores for better marketing visibility and have signed partnership agreements with other retailers across Romania, being also constantly present at all food festivals and gastronomic events. “Grandmother’s Cellar”, for example, offers the potential customers the opportunity to taste from its wide range of jams before buying.

An important and developed niche is represented by the refrigerated wild fruit and forest mushrooms. “Ecofruct Ltd” in Târgu-Mureş is an experienced producer and exporter. “Agrosprint Ltd” from the village Breaza is a ten-year old family business, exporting over 80% of its production.

Herbal tea cultivation is an ancient occupation throughout the “*Széklers’ Land*”. Local producers and suppliers operate both locally and at a national level. “Larix Com Impex Ltd” is an important limited liability company based in Sovata, which holds an important market share, whose total sales volume reached over 5 million RON in 2014, due to its wide range of products (bulk and retail) and its countrywide distribution network. “Larix Com Impex” tea products are sold in health shops, health food stores and partner pharmacies. Established in 1999, “Vitaplant Ltd” is another important local producer that relies on its on-line store as well as on the main distribution network in the field for the sale of its quality herbal teas and aromatic plants (Table 8).

Table 8

List of tea, seasonings, spices and vinegar producers in Mureş County involved in short food supply chains

No	Producer’s/retailer’s name	Place of production/producer or retailer	Range of produce/Types of SFSCs
1	<i>Vitaplant Ltd.</i>	Eremitu	Seller of tea products by means of pharmacies and partner health shops. The seller also owns an on-line shop. (www.vitaplant.ro)
2	<i>Larix Com Impex Ltd.</i>	Sovata	Producer of herbal teas, aromatic & medicinal tea products. (http://larix.ro/)
3	<i>Aceto Ltd.</i>	Botos	Certified organic apple cider vinegar (with honey mix) (http://www.agriculturae.ro/index.php/agricultura-ecologica/produse-ecologice/1240-otetul-100-natural-de-batos-judetul-mures.html).
4	<i>Pacovis România Ltd.</i>	Târgu Mureş	Spices and seasonings for the agri-food industry

Source: own elaboration based on Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency database (DSVSA Mureş)

“Szakács Csaba” is a noteworthy example of good practices in business, given the fact that this trader is the only farmer employing biodynamic techniques in cultivating over 100 hectares of medicinal plants. “Szakács Csaba” is the only local Sonnentor Kräuterhandels GmbH member in Romania.

Closely related, seasonings and spices growing represent a niche market, with most harvested crops intended for the upstream industry of seasonings/spices processing. A noteworthy example, “Pacovis Romania Ltd”, was established in 2002 as a subsidiary of the Switzerland-based Pacovis A.G., which operates businesses in several countries worldwide and had a turnover of more than 3 million euro in 2014.

The alcoholic drinks industry in Mureş County is well developed, as shown by several vinification units, including “Prescon Vineyard Ltd”, “AMB Wine Company Ltd”, “Castel Vinum Ltd” and “Familia Petru Ltd”, all of which were set up after 1989 (Table 9). With its headquarters in Târgu-Mureş, the winemaker “Prescon Vineyard”, whose vineyards total 68 hectares, sells bottled wines (“*Culpiului Vineyards*”, “*Lechința Coat of Arms*”) as well as table wine.

Table 9

List of producers of alcoholic beverages in Mureş County
involved in short food supply chains

No	Producer's/retailer's name	Place of production/ producer or retailer	Range of produce/Types of SFSCs
1	<i>Prescon Vineyard Ltd.</i>	Târgu-Mureş	Bottles noble wines under the brand “ <i>Culpiului Valleys</i> ” and “ <i>Lechința Coat of Arms</i> ” but also sells table wine; owns two wineshops/bars in Târgu-Mureş and Câmpenița
2	<i>AMB Wine Company Ltd.</i>	Batoş	Producer and seller of “Liliac” wines, which has an on-line shop and merchandises by means of 17 partner retail outlets in Romania and abroad http://www.liliac.com/ro/
3	<i>Castel Vinum Ltd.</i>	Mica	Bottles several wines under the brand “ <i>Villa Vinea</i> ”. Its certified quality wines (PSR) are mainly sold through specific distributors. (http://www.villavinea.com/)
4	<i>Familia Petru Ltd.</i>	Târnăveni	Local brand that markets certified quality wines (PSR). The small-scale vine-grower offers tourists and potential customers the wine-tasting opportunity as well as information at its wine cellar/restaurant. Partnerships with various distributors ensure the selling of its product range in liquor shops, grocery stores or other points of sale. (www.familiapetru.ro/)
5	<i>Heineken PLC</i>	Ungheni	Heineken Company, whose beer plant in Ungheni processes local hops, especially from the Sighişoara area. A large part of Heineken’s production is sold in Romania under the <i>Neumarkt</i> brand. http://puternicsiamarui.ro
6	<i>Aphrodita Ltd.</i>	Ibăneşti Pădure	Local small-scale brewery called “Lăpuşna”, which bottles natural unfiltered and unpasteurized beer obtained on the basis of a recipe requiring moist yeasts The producer uses local workforce and hops.

Source: own elaboration based on Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency database (DSVSA Mureş)

Besides owning and managing two stores in Târgu-Mureş and Câmpeniţa, the company also relies on nationwide distributors, given its annual production volume of 2,000 hectolitres. Another important winemaker which manages part of the “Lechinţa” plantation of grape-bearing vine is “the AMB Wine Company”, the producer and seller of “Liliac” wines, which has an on-line shop and merchandises by means of 17 partner retail outlets in Romania and abroad (Austria, United Kingdom, Luxembourg and Switzerland). “Castel Vinum” Ltd. Bottles several wines under the brand “*Villa Vinea*”. Its certified quality wines (PSR) are mainly sold through specific distributors. “Familia Petru Ltd” is a respected local brand marketing certified quality wines (PSR); this small-scale vine-grower provides tourists and potential customers the wine-tasting opportunity as well as information at its wine cellar/restaurant. Partnerships with various distributors ensure the selling of its product range in liquor shops, grocery stores or other points of sale. In the drinks industry, one small-scale company is “Aceto Ltd” in the village Batoş, whose vinegar and vinegar and sweet honey mix products are certified as organic, as a result of the fact that it uses produce from orchards and honey bee hives in the Reghin area and its surroundings.

Besides its winemaking sector, Mureş County is also noted for its beer industry. Breweries have a long history in the area and owe their existence to hop crops, the cultivation of which is another ancient occupation in the area. One of the leading brewers in terms of turnover is the Heineken Company, whose beer plant in Ungheni processes local hops, especially from the Sighişoara area. A large part of Heineken’s production is sold in Romania under the “Neumarkt” brand. Worth mentioning is another local small-scale brewery called “Lăpuşna”, which bottles natural unfiltered and unpasteurized beer obtained on the basis of a recipe requiring moist yeasts; this small brewer uses local workforce and hops and merchandises only locally.

Mureş County boasts a large number of farmers’ markets, wholesale markets and other points of sale, larger than warranted by the number of its inhabitants. In the town of Târgu-Mureş alone, there are 7 well managed farmers markets (*Piaţa Cuza Vodă, Piaţa 1848, Piaţa Dacia, Piaţa Diamant, Piaţa 22 Decembrie 1989, Piaţa Unirii* and *Piaţa Mureşeni*), which supply a wide range of local food products. It can be noted that the markets provide local farmers coming from nearby villages, especially from the areas with a strong agricultural heritage (*Valea Gurghiului, Ibăneşti, Valea Mureşului, Valea Nirajului* and others), with designated counters and stands. The Mureş County Council, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Mureş, as well as other local institutions are constantly involved in organizing and promoting various trade fairs and other similar events where local and regional small-size producers and farmers have the opportunity to exhibit their products.

Of importance are the temporary food markets/trade fairs, often held on a daily or weekly basis, such as “*The Wine and Artisans’ Art and Crafts Fair*”

(Târgu-Mureş), “*The Trade Fair of Traditional Products*” (Sighişoara), “*The Winter Trade Fair/Festival*” (Reghin), “*The Villagers’ Trade Fair*” (Iernut), “*The Traditional Trade Fair and Festival – The Days of Sărmaşu village*”, “*The Traditional Trade Fair – City days*” (held in Sângeorgiu de Pădure town), “*The Pentecost (Whit Sunday) Trade Fair*”, “*The Harvest Trade Fair*”, “*<Saint Michael’s> Trade fair*” (both 3 held in Bahnea village), “*The Traditional Trade Fair <Apple’s festival>*” (Batoş village), “*The Countryside Trade Fair*” (Băluşeri village), “*Wheat Days Trade Fair*” (Crăieşti village), “*The Cranberries Trade Fair and Festival*” (Câmpu Cetăţii village), “*The Flowers’ Trade Fair and Festival*” (held in Fărăgău village), “*The Farmers’ and Artisans’ Art & Crafts Fair*” (Găleşti), “*The Festival of the Villagers from Gurghiului Valley*” (Ibăneşti village), “*Harvest Days – Exhibit of Farm Products*” (held in Nadeş), “*The Traditional Trade and Crafts Fair*” (Hodoşa), “*The Trade Fair of Mellons*” (Sânpaul and Sărmaşu villages), “*Fish Trade Fair*” (Tăureni), “*The Spring And Fall Fair*” (held in Vătava village), “*The Fish Trade Fair*” (held in Zău de Câmpie village) and “*The Hop Harvest Festival*” (Seleuş village) (Mureş County Council Board, 2015).

5. CONCLUSIONS

On a global scale, it can be noted that end consumers tend to reconsider their agri-food sector buying habits. The tendency could be partially explained by a significant increase in customers getting aware of the importance of quality agri-food products, and partly by the increase of incomes in certain segments of the population. At the same time, the number of end customers who appreciate local farmers and agri-food sector producers to the detriment of foreign conventional ones, promoted mainly by the large international chain stores, is on the rise.

According to the current perspective of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the merchandising of local agri-food sector products by means of SFSCs must gradually become an important part of the Romanian agri-food sector. Furthermore, the ministry also considers that a significant number of farmers could earn substantially higher revenues by means of direct sales of fresh agricultural products (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, p. 520). In order to ensure a better marketing of agricultural products, the association of small-size farmers into cooperatives is a mandatory medium and long term target. While support coming from local communities is important in the development of small businesses, end consumers provide by far the main financial and moral support.

Based on the findings in Mureş County we have discovered that there are numerous business initiatives, a situation that can be explained by means of the strong entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes the local rural population, which is deeply committed to the processing of raw agricultural products with the view of

obtaining finished goods (jams, jellies, syrups, dairy, bakery and confectionery products, homemade fruit and vegetable preserves, meat and meat specialties). As a result, more value is added to the economic activities of both local small-sized households and livestock farms.

The food industry in Mureş County depends on its geographical features. According to statistical data available for 2015 from the Mureş Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Agency, out of 1,990 officially registered economic operators, 1,646 were local processing units delivering food products of animal origin, while 344 units were specialized in processing/selling products of non-animal origin. *Most of the commercially active units in the food retail sector are using selling methods and practices specific to SFSCs.* The main merchandizing forms, specific to SFSCs, are: sales directly to consumers (“on-farm” sales), sales on farmers’ markets, (temporary farmers’ markets in certain urban areas), roadside sales, sales near tourism sites, sales occasioned by trade fairs/food festivals, privately owned retail outlet sales - butcher’s, meat processors, bakeries, groceries, milk vending machines (in farmers’ markets predominantly), exhibition stands, mobile food carts (especially in areas frequented by tourists) and on-line shops. Given the fact that on-line shopping generally becomes more and more popular, many producers are investing in developing on-line shops as a very efficient method of market expansion.

Mureş County has a strong tourism potential, largely due to its natural and cultural heritage, which also provide opportunities for the promotion and selling of local products, either on the occasion of trade fests or specific festivals, where people also have the opportunity to interact directly with producers and learn the “story of the produce”.

There are many local “successful stories” concerning small local entrepreneurs such as “*Dalmasso*” (in the village Saschiz), owner of the “*House on the Hill*” brand, or “*Petry*” (founded in 1879, sellers of traditional meat specialties), who now own more than 20 shops in the counties of Mureş, Harghita and Cluj. A similar story is that of “*Therezia*” (dairy products seller), well known both locally and abroad (U.K., Spain, France, Sweden, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Greece and Cyprus). The market success of such entrepreneurs is largely a result of product quality as well as of a strong sense of solidarity between community members. The support provided by local people to their fellow entrepreneurs has had a decisive effect in the promotion of local brands.

The following financial incentives (provided by the 2014-2020 National Rural Development Program) for enhancing the processing and marketing of agricultural products, are currently available: *Sub-measure 4.2 “Investments for processing/marketing of agricultural products”* (support for the introduction of new technologies for the development of new products and processes is also included), as well as *Sub-measure 4.2a “Investments in processing/marketing of products from the fruit-growing sector”*. Both measures primarily aim to aid

producer groups and cooperatives. Small farmers' access as beneficiaries to such grants is rather difficult. In spite of this, Romania has included several special promotion and development measures for small farmers and the short food supply sector as a whole: *Sub-measure 16.4 "Support for horizontal and vertical cooperation among actors in the supply chain for the establishment and development of short supply chains and local markets, and for related promotion activities in a local context"*. Of utmost importance in this matter is the fact that the sub-measure provides 100% non-reimbursable aid for business projects up to 100.000 euro, whose eligible beneficiaries can be small farmers and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

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