

SUMMARY

The doctoral thesis entitled "**Research on the Development and Consolidation of the Local Agri-Food Products Market in Iași County through Marketing Strategies**" addresses current issues identified within the local agri-food product market in Iași County by studying consumer behavior in this area, as well as relevant natural, economic, social, technological, and political factors influencing this market. The research outlines and proposes marketing strategies focused on strategic differentiation through positioning, pricing, market segmentation, distribution, accessibility, and both traditional and digital promotion, aiming to develop and consolidate the strategic positioning of economic units involved in producing and marketing local agri-food products.

The thesis comprises an introduction, eight chapters, references, and appendices, structured into two main parts.

The **introduction** provides an overview of the research topic, the context, and the current state of knowledge in the field, as well as the motivation behind selecting this research subject.

Part I, titled "**Literature Review on the Current State of Knowledge in the Field**" begins with **Chapter I, "Literature Review on the Market of Domestic Agri-Food Products"**. This chapter comprises three subchapters that address, from a theoretical perspective, the evolution of market and agri-food product concepts, consumer needs, motivations, and influencing factors, as well as the economic, social, and ecological relevance of domestic agri-food consumption.

Chapter II, entitled "**Marketing Theories and Strategies Applied in the Agri-Food Industry**", is structured into five subchapters dedicated to the concept of agri-food marketing, synthesizing contributions from both national and international literature. It analyzes theoretical foundations, strategies for differentiating domestic agri-food products, the extension of the marketing mix from the "4Ps" to the "7Ps," the role of certifications in enhancing product competitiveness, and key directions regarding market, pricing, distribution, and promotion strategies.

Part II, titled "**Original Contributions**", begins with **Chapter III, "Research Purpose, Objectives and Methodology"**. This chapter outlines the research problem, the purpose of the research, the general objective, specific objectives of the study and the activities carried out to achieve these objectives.

The identified problem highlights the competitiveness and accessibility challenges faced by domestic agri-food products on the market, emphasizing their contribution to Romania's trade deficit in this sector. The absence of effective marketing strategies limits the visibility and sales growth of domestic agri-food products compared to imported ones, thus justifying the need for this research, which

aims to identify solutions for optimizing their market valorization. Within this context, the purpose of the study is to identify key factors influencing consumer purchasing behavior of domestic agri-food products in Iași County, to assess the impact of various marketing strategies on their visibility and competitiveness, and to outline viable marketing approaches for the development of the local agri-food market. The research objectives include analyzing consumer behavior, identifying decision-making factors in the purchasing process, and strategically segmenting the consumer base in Iași County. The study also examines the advantages and limitations of domestic versus imported agri-food products, the influence of marketing strategies on sales, and the effectiveness of communication channels.

The following section presents the research methodology, which employed methodological triangulation in examining the market for domestic agri-food products, combining multiple research methods to enhance the validity of the findings. The study was conducted during 2017 - 2024, beginning with secondary research through an extensive review of national and international academic literature, supplemented by statistical data analysis to contextualize the economic environment and the potential of the domestic agri-food sector.

Subsequently, primary data collection was carried out through two complementary sociological approaches: qualitative research, via in-depth interviews with 30 consumers of domestic agri-food products in Iași County, and quantitative research, through a survey applied to a representative sample of 385 individuals from the same region. This chapter outlines the methodological approach, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and the tools used for interpreting the results.

Additionally, the case study method is used, focusing on the analysis of marketing strategies and economic performance over the past five years of a local agri-food business in Iași County—Krud Restaurant & Grocery .

Chapter IV presents "**A Sociological Analysis of Perceptions and Realities Concerning the Market for Domestic Agri-Food Products in Iași County**" and comprises of two subchapters, each dedicated to a specific research approach: one focusing on the qualitative study and the other on the quantitative analysis. The qualitative research section outlines the specific purpose and objectives of the study, along with the data collection instrument—namely, the in-depth interview—conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The discussions focused on themes related to the consumption of domestic versus imported agri-food products, within the context of Iași County.

The qualitative research revealed a series of recurring themes that served as the basis for hypotheses later tested in the quantitative phase. Among these, the origin of agri-food products emerged as a highly significant factor, with consumption being primarily influenced by taste, quality, and perceived health benefits. Weaknesses of

domestic products compared to imported ones included limited availability in large retail chains and local stores, reduced variety, high prices, and declining quality with increased production. Preferred purchase locations were large retail chains, markets, and neighborhood stores. The integration of domestic products into restaurant menus was positively perceived, with a clear preference for establishments using local ingredients. In terms of promotion, respondents identified both a low volume and quality of communication, with a strong preference for online channels and messages focused on consumption benefits and production transparency.

The subchapter detailing the quantitative research includes a description of the sections of the research instrument—the questionnaire—as well as an in-depth analysis of the collected data through both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The role of descriptive analysis was to summarize and interpret the collected data using statistical indicators such as means, percentages, frequencies, and standard deviations, in order to identify trends and patterns in consumer behavior. Inferential analysis enabled the generalization of results from the sample to the broader population, highlighting relationships between expressed opinions and demographic or other variables. This included the application of statistical tests such as t-tests, ANOVA, quartile-based split-point analysis, Post-Hoc tests, Chi-Square, Levene's test, and Pearson correlation, to determine causal relationships and the statistical significance of the findings.

The conclusions of the quantitative research, relevant to the investigated topic, outline the state of the agri-food product market in Iași County as follows:

The quantitative research findings relevant to the studied topic reveal the following aspects of the agri-food market in Iași County:

- Consumers place importance on the origin of agri-food products, with 84.6% expressing a preference for domestic over imported products;
- There are notable shortcomings in the distribution strategies of domestic agri-food products compared to imported ones, particularly regarding their limited presence in large retail chains and local proximity markets;
 - The most relevant factors influencing the consumption of domestic agri-food products, in order of importance, are quality, taste, point-of-sale proximity, brand/producer, origin, price/promotion/offer, and support for local producers and the national economy;
- Key weaknesses of domestic agri-food products relative to imports are reduced accessibility and variety, insufficient promotion, lack of transparency regarding production methods, absence of certifications, consumer distrust, and inconsistent quality over time;
- The inclusion of domestic agri-food products in restaurant offerings is considered important, with 72.1% of respondents stating that such

ingredients enhance the taste of the dishes and expressing a preference for restaurants that use them as primary ingredients.;

- Deficiencies in the implementation of promotion strategies were identified, as reflected by the majority preference of respondents (41.8%) for more intensive communication through social media platforms.

Chapter V, entitled "**The Current Situation of the Domestic Agri-Food Products Market**", includes research on the economic, social, and agri-food potential of the North-East Development Region and Iași County, as well as the value-based evolution of exports, imports, and the trade balance in the domestic agri-food product sector.

Chapter VI, entitled "**Analysis of Marketing Strategies Implemented to Enhance the Value of Local Agri-Food Products in Iași County: A Case Study on KRUD Restaurant & Grocery**" begins with an overview of the economic entity selected for the study and continues with a detailed analysis of the marketing activities implemented (market, pricing, product, and promotional strategies) alongside a financial indicators analysis (turnover, profit, operational costs) during 2018–2023. The analysis indicates that the favorable economic development of Krud was grounded in the implementation of marketing strategies aligned with market trends, such as maintaining high product quality standards, introducing special offers, expanding the range of products and services, and adopting digital marketing strategies.

The local agri-food products marketed by Krud have experienced a quantitative increase year over year, being integrated into culinary preparations that add value. The implementation of intensive growth, distribution, and pricing strategies, including tactical adjustments during the pandemic period, has contributed to expanding business locations and increasing sales.

Chapter VII presents "**Marketing Strategies Proposals for the Growth and Consolidation of the Domestic Agri-Food Products Market in Iași County**", providing practical applicability to the research and offering specific solutions to problems identified through sociological analyses and the case study.

To improve the local agri-food product offerings in Iași County, **product strategies** are proposed, emphasizing differentiation of local products by enhancing aspects proven to be significant for consumers in Iași County, such as superior quality, taste, freshness, and organic nature.

The development of **market and pricing strategies** aligned with the specific characteristics of the target audience requires the adoption of a **differentiated pricing system** that reflects both the added value of agri-food products and the particularities of the market. It is recommended to implement a market segmentation strategy, as well as a strategy aimed at expanding the target market by leveraging local agri-food products through strategic partnerships with the HoReCa sector,

public institutions, and regional distributors. Such partnerships can facilitate producers' access to consistent orders and represent another strategy with positive effects for local producers.

The detailed analyses highlight the importance of expanding the **presence of local agri-food products in digital, convenience, and proximity commerce** by developing online direct-sales platforms that facilitate consumer access to local products. Such platforms would enable personalized deliveries, negotiations with major retail chains, and the implementation of short supply chains through local markets, micro-markets, agricultural cooperatives, and strategic partnerships.

In order to enhance the visibility and sales of domestic agri-food products in Iași County, it is recommended to implement **digital marketing strategies**, particularly social media communication that highlights local producers and the benefits of consuming such products. Recommended actions include: creating educational content focused on consumption benefits, production methods, and community impact; showcasing domestic agri-food products and recipes in which they can be incorporated; promoting local agri-food businesses and points of sale; developing viral campaigns, using testimonials, email marketing, and search engine promotion.

The recommended **offline marketing strategies** emphasize experiential marketing by facilitating impactful consumer interactions through the organization of tastings, culinary events, and unique thematic fairs.

Differentiation through branding strategies involves the development of local brands and the creation of strong visual identities that reflect the quality and authenticity of the products. This includes designing attractive packaging and labels that highlight key characteristics of domestic agri-food products, obtaining certifications to enhance consumer trust, and adapting products to current consumption trends.

Chapter VIII of the thesis presents the **conclusions and recommendations** drawn from the entire content of the doctoral research. The chapter ends with a series of notes regarding the limitations of the study, such as those related to time constraints, the geographical scope of the research, or access to non-public, confidential, or restricted resources. It also outlines directions for future research, which could include comparative analyses of local agri-food product consumption in Iași County and other regions. Another relevant research direction could focus on how local agri-food products are marketed within major retail chains in Romania, considering that the sociological analysis highlighted significant issues with the availability of a diverse range of local agri-food products in these sales channels.