

OFFICIAL SYSTEMS OF QUALITY IN FRANCE

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Introduction

The official systems of quality have been created to promote our food products and agriculture and to develop products of higher quality. In France, this quality is related to the origin, the good taste, the landscape respect. Moreover, when a food crisis occurs, confidence must be reinforced and consumers are searching for products, the safety of which is guaranteed by official controls, although these products are more expensive.

Material and methods

1. Official systems of quality

These official systems of quality are divided in official signs for products and a global system including all uses in farms. All these systems of quality are optional. Official signs also exist in the EEC, such as "appellation d'origine protégée" (AOP) and "indication géographique protégée" (IGP) or "attestation de spécificité" (AS). When a French operator wants to use AOP, IGP and AS he must also ask concomitantly for a "label rouge" (LR) and "certification de conformité de produits" (CCP).

1.1. Official signs

The aim of the law of the 9th July 1999 on the agriculture strategy is to safeguard quality and origin to consumers. The decree n°96-193 of the 12th March 1996, introduced four official signs of origin and quality for products, "appellation d'origine contrôlée" (AOC) which identifies a product that draws its authenticity and specificity from its geographic origin, "certification de conformité de produits" (CCP) with specifications of constant quality, "label rouge" (LR) which guarantees prime quality, "agriculture biologique" (AB) which is an organic farming production that uses cultural and farming practices that aim to respect natural balances. These signs are respectively dated from 1965 for LR, 1966 for AOC, 1980 for AB, 1990 for CCP. Since the beginning of the nineties, these signs are not strictly limited to wines for AOC and to fowl for label and even vegetables, beef, pork...or fishes are certified.

For CCP and LR, operators write their own specifications and present their system of reference to the referential section of the "Commission nationale des labels et des certifications de produits agricoles et alimentaires" (CNLC). This section may approve these systems of reference provided they are conformed to the standards of the section.

For organic farming, in the vegetal sector, operators must respect the European regulation n°2092-91 whereas, in the animal sector, operators must respect the French specifications "CC REPAB F". The organic farming section helps operators to interpret these systems of reference.

1.2. Global system

Now, citizens are also interested by other aims such as environmental problems, security for persons working in a farm, animal welfare or traceability of all treatment on animals or vegetables. The integrated farming is a concept newly regulated in France with the decree

n°2002-631 of the 25th April 2002, which takes into account all these subjects. The reference for farmers is national, and all described in the rule of the 30th April 2002. It is divided in 98 requirements grouped in the following parts : knowledge of the farm and farming through vocational training, traceability, health and security of employees, ground management, fertilisation, sanitary products for plants, irrigation, animals identification, animal health, animal feed, animal welfare, hygiene, waste management, landscape and biological diversity respect. Some of these items are limited to the farms producing plants and others to the farms producing animals or their products.

The referential section of the "Commission nationale de l'agriculture raisonnée" (CNAR) gives farmers some advice for implementing the 98 items.

2. Official controls

Whatever is the official system considered, products certification for quality or origin signs or the farm qualification for integrated farming, the ministry of agriculture and the ministry of consumption are in charge of a two-steps control.

The control bodies guarantee the first step of the official control by regularly inspecting all operators in the production chain.

On the second step these control bodies must be accredited by the COFRAC (Comité français d'accréditation) on the basis of the NF EN 45011 standard in order to check criteria such as independence, impartiality and competence.

Moreover, control bodies must present their inspection plan and penalty table to the agreement section of the CNLC for quality signs and the agreement section of the CNAR for integrated farming.

These consultative agreement sections give then their opinion on the agreement of the control bodies. On the agreement section's (of the CNLC) advice, the French ministries in charge of agriculture and consumption deliver an agreement to the control body for the certification of food products (for quality or origin signs). If the agreement section of the CNAR is favourable to the agreement the French ministries in charge of agriculture and consumption may deliver the agreement to the control body for the qualification of farms (for integrated farming).

AOC products are linked to the ground, climate and people's abilities and these AOC are delivered by the Institut national des appellations d'origine" (INAO).

Results

1. Number of control bodies

In France among 23 control bodies : 15 are implicated in LR and CCP for fowl and eggs whereas only 5 of them control LR and CCP for fishes , molluscs or crustaceans.

Five control bodies have an agreement for organic farming control.

At this time, 13 control bodies have already sent their inspection plan and penalty table to the agreement section

of the CNAR. The first agreements for integrated farming have been promulgated the 28th of march 2004 on the *Journal Officiel de la République française*.

2. Production

In 2001, the turnover for AOC is the highest of all quality signs (see table 1, references 1 and 2).

Table 1 : Number of farms concerned and turnover in 2001

(1) number of companies

(2) in milliard €

Signs	AOC	AB	CCP	LR
N° of farms	113000	10364	218(1)	39816
N° of products	About 550	/	About 300	About 450
Turnover	17(2)	6	2.7	1.7

In 2001, CCP mainly concern beef and pork with 37% of the CCP whereas fowl represents 26% and sea products 2%.

Concerning label rouge, avian products count 54% of the red labels and 45% of the total turnover for red labels whereas sea products reach only 1,8% of this turnover. Thus, the main sector of LR remains the avian sector. The LR represents 10,9 of the slaughtered fowl and 17% of all the chickens slaughtered in France.

Concerning AB production fowl and eggs production represent respectively 8.8% and 10.4% of the organic farms.

Discussion

1. Evolution of the systems

The role of the agreement sections is to harmonize the inspection plans and penalty table of all control bodies so as all the operators must have the same chance to have certified products and / or qualified farms. In France, French authorities want to keep this two-steps control which gives the same chance to everybody. Thus, impartiality is guaranteed by a large representation in each section of producers, members of food industry, consumers, research institutes, control bodies, associations of employees, official authorities...

The referential sections take into account the technical improvements in order to review the national systems of reference or instructions.

2. Relation between private brands and official quality systems

Official signs have been created to propose different products to the consumers. When consumers prefer a quality product they are able to pay more for them than for conventional products. But through the law of the 9th July 1999, official authorities tend to limit the official signs so as consumers must have a clear message on higher quality products. Now private brands such as "produit de l'année" and "saveur de l'année" are used and the role of the French authorities is to keep the message as clear as possible. Concerning these private brands they are not checked by agreed control bodies. Moreover these private brands are not informing about an higher approved quality as they are only tested by a small group of consumers.

3. Relation between the official systems of quality

Official signs and integrated farming may exist in the same farm as products concerned by signs may be produced in one farm respecting the global system of integrated farming. Otherwise different labels informing consumers are used for official signs, whereas the mention "product issued from a qualified farm" is used for integrated farming.

Organic farming and integrated farming are quite different; organic farming is just looking for cultural practices respecting environment whereas integrated farming includes various items such as security, hygiene, animals welfare and health and so on, as previously described. Moreover, the use of artificial products is forbidden by the organic farming and permitted but at a reasonable dose for integrated farming.

Conclusion

These systems give official guarantees to the French consumers and citizens, as far as control bodies check operators are respecting their specifications for origin, quality signs or integrated farming. Moreover, all labels or mentions are inspected by the Fraud Squad and all sanitary measures are controlled by the Veterinary Services such as for all conventional products or farms.

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References

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