

# FOOD CONSUMPTION – REALITIES AND CHALLENGES

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## Abstract

*Nowadays, in a world where manifestations of globalization are increasingly diverse, the specific issue of consumption has important connotations. Consumers face decisive choices: health or taste; traditional or modern; domestic or import etc.?; in these conditions their choices is significantly limited by the size and strength of large food distributors and producers. The research conducted has used national statistics, and also recent studies conducted worldwide, which addresses the issue of consumption not only in terms of subjective aspects but also like effect / result of subjective influences. So we analyzed some of the major trends in food consumption in the last decade. Results of the study aimed prospects consumption amid the phenomena: concentration of production and distribution; market globalization; accountability of decision makers in the agri-food sector.*

## Keywords

*consumption; food products; food markets; globalisation; responsibility; food security*

## Introduction

Behavior consumer study is a complex area. It can be approached from several perspectives, among which stands: actual consumption research of quantitative, qualitative and structural perspective; research spending of households; analysis of the mechanisms that influence consumption and consumer behavior. The research questions are: How will evolve the food consumption?; What will be the future consumption patterns?; Who decides what we eat?

Consumers in general and food consumption particularly are influenced by many factors, which can be divided into two broad categories: objective and subjective factors. In the category of objective factors the specialists include: wages and incomes; purchasing power; characteristics of fiscal policy; price developments; typology of consumer credit; consumer expectations on revenue and others [Stanciu, 2008]. Subjective factors influencing consumption refers to the customs, traditions, beliefs individuals: desire to create cash reserves which reduces current consumption expenditure; desire to obtain interest income on amounts saved; individuals instincts in terms of raising living standards; feelings of independence and freedom of movement; manifestation of the stinginess, in some cases [Zahiu, 2001].

## 1. Literature review

In the household consumption of food products is not in a direct proportional relationship to the number of members; the needs are different from one individual to another [Manole, 2005]. The options regarding the choice of household for food products consider the following important levels: quantity; quality; equilibrium in the choice of products; time for buying and preparation.

Regarding the amount of food purchased and consumed, it is limited by the physical and biological potential of individuals that make up the household, and also by the available budget. In terms of quality, individual consumers and households seeking to maximize quality – price ratio. This report is perceived differently by the buyers (individuals, households and communities), depending on the income they have, and subjective elements, such as product image, perceptions, consumer experiences and other.

In time, at the household level, we are witnessing various changes in consumption patterns. Statistically, within households there is a development in two ways, namely: households

consisting of young growths numerical and, consequently, increases in consumption, and households composed of older people have decreased demographic and obviously, consumption reductions.

**Patterns of food consumption** Food is a particularly sensitive issue for all of us, especially for countries that fail to ensure an appropriate level. Food is determined by: the consumer; purchasing power; type of society; legislation etc. A consumer model is defined by a set of specific behaviors of a population or economic entities, relating to the acquisition or production processes under its own, for the purposes of direct use of products and services to satisfy consumer needs.

In practice, consumption patterns are used either for analysis of real situations, consumptions made recorded in a particular geographic area and within a certain period of time, either to modeling decision-making processes. In the process of studying consumer behavior are used various models, some static, other dynamic, models that can (or not, as the case) consider interactions between consumers [Alexandri, 2004]. Consumer behaviors involve achieving certain specific activities, reflecting awareness, at consumer level, of certain consumer needs and opportunities. Obviously, many consumer behaviors are repeated, from time to time, according to the specific needs of individuals consumers and opportunities to meet them. It outlines, at a market or a population, more consumption patterns between which may manifest certain areas of relative overlap or coincidence.

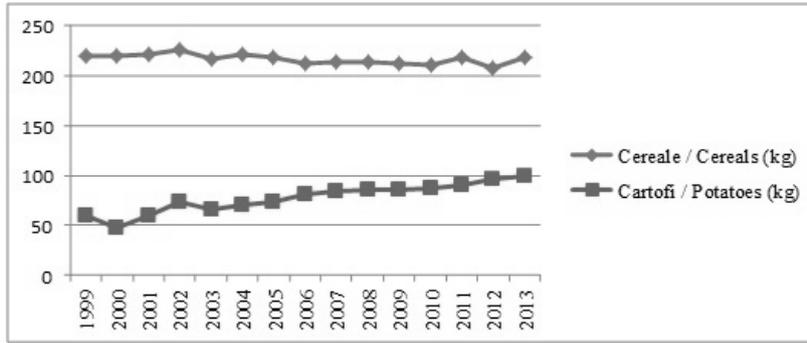
The pattern food consumption is a component of general consumer model, component characterized by particularly complex, which aims to explain the mechanism of buying and consumption behavior of individual consumption of food products. Specifically, the pattern of food consumption includes issues related to: organizing consumption; feeding practices; the quantity and quality of food; food basket structure; food behavior etc. In the process of defining a model of food consumption are essential following two groups of factors [Gavrilescu, Giurcă, 2000]: consumer needs and the possibility of consumption. The consumer needs are mainly determined by the characteristics of consumer economic activity and consumer traditions. The possibility of consumption maybe influenced by: the economic power of the consumer; features offer; economic and social level development of economy and society. In Romania, due to the significant share of rural population (in total population), for a significant period worked a combined pattern of food consumption: on the one hand urban population model, characterized by a restricted access to food, mainly for purchasing power, and on the other rural model, characteristic of households possessing certain areas of land and whose model depends on its production and purchasing power. It must be added and widely recognized fact that self-consumption is a variable difficult to estimate, regardless of the type of research. The world manifest significant differences in food consumption patterns, between poor countries, developing countries and developed countries, and globalization does not always bring the best solutions [Alexandri, 2004].

Buying behavior specific for the food products is influenced by many factors, among which are distinguished (except factors closely related to the product, such as composition, sensory characteristics, quality, branding etc.): distribution system, but also the reputation of the store / distribution unit; the assembly of information and messages, communication system that makes his presence known on the market of food products; economic factors such as: income; purchasing power; prices of food products; social factors: social status; family; groups of belonging; cultural factors: traditions; customs; values; demographic factors: age; gender; marital status; household size; place of residence; nationality. Analyzing the factors that influence food consumption and demand in rich countries, some experts [Connor, 1994] considers that income and price - traditional factors of influence, acting indirectly through socio-demographic factors, between laying down certain relations of direct nature.

## **2. Realities and challenges**

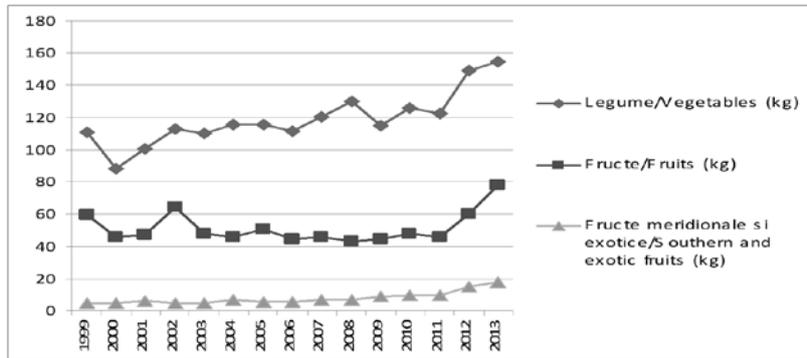
## 2.1 Realities

### Yearly average consumption per inhabitant in Romania, 1999-2013



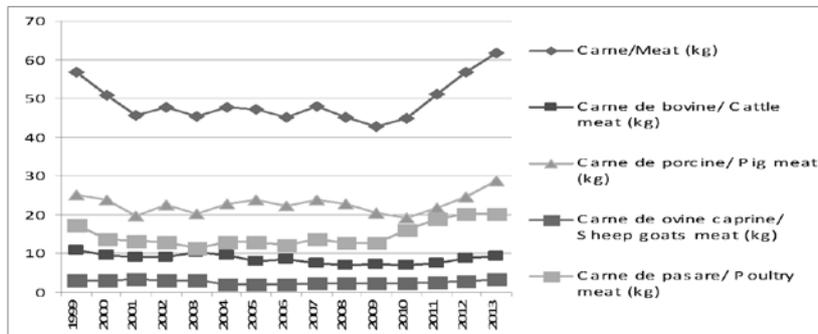
Source: TEMPO on line, INSSE, 2015

**Fig. 1 Yearly average consumption per inhabitant: cereals and potatoes**



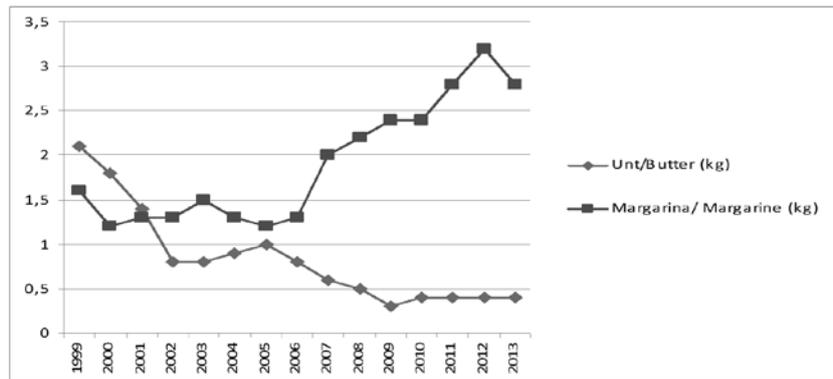
Source: TEMPO on line, INSSE, 2015

**Fig. 2 Yearly average consumption per inhabitant: vegetables, fruits, southern and exotic fruits**



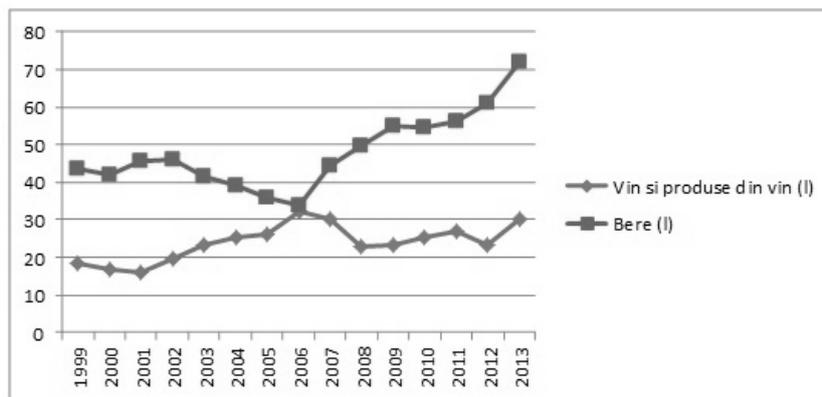
Source: TEMPO on line, INSSE, 2015

**Fig. 3 Yearly average consumption per inhabitant: meat (total), cattle meat, pig meat, sheep and goats meat, poultry meat**



Source: TEMPO on line, INSSE, 2015

**Fig. 4 Yearly average consumption per inhabitant: butter and margarine**



Source: TEMPO on line, INSSE, 2015

**Fig. 5 Yearly average consumption per inhabitant: wine and beer**

### **Food waste**

Landmarks of food waste:

- in the world, yearly waste 1,3 billion tones of food; unused food production represent about 30% from farmland (2013, FAO);
- the Europeans waste represent 180 kg agricultural and food products / inhabitant; the Romanian waste represents 100 kg agricultural and food products / inhabitant (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development). About 10% of the food they buy Romanians in a year, around 2.2 million tones, reaching the trash. Food waste is one of the biggest problems of the modern world, and annually Romania produce a waste of food five million tones (2013, agriculture Minister);
- 2014 was designated for European Commission the year against food wastage.

### **Population health**

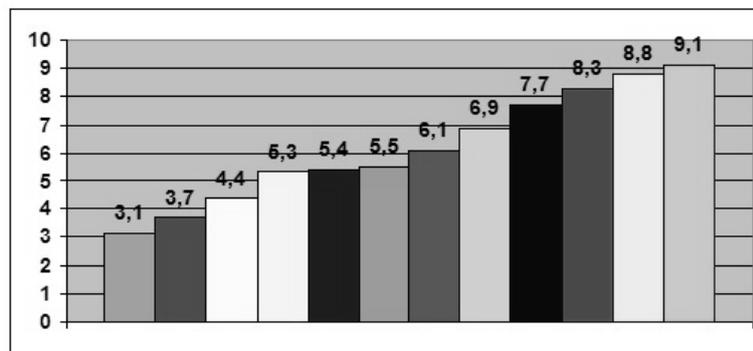
- about 2,1 billion persons (representing 30% from global population) are overweight or obese (FAO);
- the overall cost of obesity: about 2.000 billion dollars / year (2,8% of world GDP).

In these conditions, obesity is one of the top three social problems of the world, after smoking and armed violence. Obesity is a major global economic problem caused by many factors. Only the impact of obesity on health systems is between 2 and 7% of total expenditure on health in developing countries. This does not include the costs of treating diseases associated with obesity, which according to some estimates the bill increased to 20% of total expenditure on health. In addition, there is evidence that employee productivity is affected by obesity, which undermines the competitiveness of businesses. If the current trend continues almost half the world's adult population will be overweight or obese by 2030. To fight obesity it recommends a series of measures such as the introduction of healthy meals in schools and at work, increasing the number of physical education classes in schools etc.

## 2.2 Challenges

We live in a world in constant movement. Goods, capital and labor globally are moving at a speed greater than ever and according to new patterns. Ernst Young has identified six major trends (megatrends) that define our world: digital convergence; strengthening entrepreneurship; creating a global market; increased demand for resources; redefining health sector; urbanization. Global megatrends are great forces of transformative nature. They define future by profound impact on economies, sectors, companies and individuals

In the coming decades the world population will be significant changes in terms of size, but also the structure and geographical distribution. These changes will have a direct impact on food demand and obvious their distribution and associated services. World Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that in 2050 the Earth's population will be about 9.1 billion people: 7.9 billion people will live in developing countries and 1.2 billion people in developed countries. A population increasingly larger move from village to town; global cities become more prosperous and gain more economic power; the top of the most prosperous cities are moving eastward; demographic trends will reshape urban growth around the globe; urbanization phenomenon was intensified: Today 54% of the current world population live in cities and by 2050 this proportion will reach 66%. An urban universe requires major investments in infrastructure, but the financing remains a challenge. Rapid urbanization will require up to 70 trillion by 2030.



Source: FAO

**Fig. 6 World population evolution**

Who decides what we eat? it is difficult to formulate a concrete answer, but we consider these relevant issues:

- the certified seed market: Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta represent about 50% and the first 10 companies 70% of total market;
- the GM seeds market: about 90% it is owned by Monsanto;
- the agrochemical market: Bayer, Syngenta and BASF own about 50% and together Dow AgroSciences, Monsanto and Dupont 75%;
- 10 companies (Nestle, Pepsi, Unilever, Mondelez, Coca Cola...) controls 70% of global food industry
- the distribution of food and drink: the world's top ten companies control 26% of the world market. Wal-Mart is one of the largest companies of the world, an economic and media empire, whose sales volume is exceeded only by the GDP of 25 countries and that, with Carrefour and Tesco owns half of the top ten groups revenues in distribution [Montagut, Dogliotti, 2008].

### **Conclusions**

Consumer issues will be present in the economy and society in the coming years and coming decades. Through the areas analyzed in this work, some of the possible solutions may be: innovative solutions for maintenance / preservation of traditions and specific cultural elements; innovative solutions for reducing the dependence of farmers to big companies (in upstream and downstream); accountability of national actors (in agrifood sector); investments in research and knowledge. The only solution of the future, including in the sphere of food consumption, is represented by sustainability.

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