

VALORIZATION OF TRADITIONAL ROMANIAN PRODUCTS FROM THE OLTENIA REGION, IN THE MODERN FOOD INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the process of valorization of Romanian traditional products in the context of the modern food industry, taking the Oltenia region as a case study. The research starts from the premise that traditional products represent not only a component of the national gastronomic and cultural heritage, but also an important economic resource for the sustainable development of the rural environment.

The main purpose of the study is to highlight the evolution, diversity and distribution of certified traditional products in Oltenia during the period 2020–2025, as well as recent trends in their adaptation to the requirements of the contemporary food market. The research material was compiled based on official data provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the county agricultural directorates, with a total of 42 certified traditional products analyzed — 29 in 2020 and 13 in 2021–2025. The method used was the statistical-descriptive analysis of products by county and by food category.

The results obtained show that Vâlcea County holds a dominant position within the region, with 23 certified products (approximately 55% of the regional total), followed by Gorj (8 products) and Olt (5 products). From a structural point of view, the "meat and meat products" category predominates, representing approximately 62% of the total products, confirming the Oltenia gastronomic specificity. In the following years, a sharp diversification of the portfolio is observed, through the appearance of artisanal beverages (19%), dairy products (7%) and those made from vegetables and fruits (7%). This evolution reflects the adaptation of local producers to modern consumption trends, oriented towards natural, authentic and sustainable products. The study highlights the fact that the Oltenia region has a considerable potential for economic and touristic valorization of traditional products, and their promotion and certification represent a strategic direction for the sustainable development of rural space and the consolidation of Romanian cultural identity.

Key words: traditional products, Oltenia, valorization, modern food industry, certification

INTRODUCTION

Traditional Romanian products represent an essential component of the national gastronomic heritage, reflecting the history, culture and regional specificity of the Romanian people. Over the centuries,

these products have been developed in close connection with local resources, natural conditions and customs of rural communities, thus becoming authentic expressions of the relationship between man, nature and food. In a global context marked by food industrialization,

standardization and uniformity of taste, traditional products stand out for their authenticity, diversity and the valorization of artisanal processing methods passed down from generation to generation. Currently, interest in traditional food products has increased significantly both at national and European level, especially due to concerns related to healthy eating, sustainability and the revaluation of local identity. These products are not only foods, but also cultural symbols, which contribute to defining Romania's gastronomic identity and to consolidating a sustainable rural economy, based on quality and tradition. Traditional products are essential elements of a nation's gastronomic and cultural heritage. They are the result of a historical process of human adaptation to their natural environment, using local resources and processing techniques passed down from generation to generation. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR), a traditional product is a food product obtained through a traditional manufacturing process, with a historically established recipe, composition and production method, which gives it a distinct identity compared to other similar products on the market.

At European level, Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 on quality systems for agricultural products and foodstuffs establishes three main categories of traditional products: Protected designation of origin (PDO) – a product whose quality or characteristics are due exclusively to the geographical environment, including natural and human factors; Protected geographical indication (PGI) – a product whose quality, reputation or other characteristics can be attributed to its geographical origin; Traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG) – a product with a

traditional composition or a traditional production method, without being linked to a specific geographical area.

Traditional products represent a factor of sustainable economic development for rural communities, through: diversification of economic activities – small producers can capitalize on local raw materials (milk, meat, fruit, cereals) by transforming them into finished products with high added value; creation of local jobs, especially for women and young people; increasing the tourist attractiveness of regions by promoting local gastronomy (gastronomic tourism, festivals, traditional fairs); strengthening cultural identity and the sense of belonging to the community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main purpose of the study is to analyze the evolution and diversity of Romanian traditional products certified in the Oltenia Region, in the context of their valorization in the modern food industry.

The research aims to:

- identify the main categories of traditional products in Oltenia;
- evaluate their distribution by counties;
- capture the evolution of the number of certified products between 2020–2025;
- provide a statistical basis for interpreting local valorization trends.

This analysis aims to highlight the contribution of traditional products to the economic and cultural development of the region and outline opportunities for integration into the modern food market.

The material used in the research consists of the official data set on certified traditional products in the Oltenia Region, collected from:

- the database of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

(MADR), section "Certified traditional products";

- public data provided by the County Agricultural Directorates of Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea;
- complementary information from publications, official websites and MADR reports (period 2020–2025).

In total, the analysis included over 30 certified traditional products, grouped by counties and by product categories (meat and meat products, beverages, milk and dairy products, vegetables-fruits, bakery products and others).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1, entitled "Certificates of traditional products registered in Oltenia in 2020" , presents the situation of traditional products in the region for that year, highlighting a total of 29 officially certified products. Analyzing the distribution by counties, it is observed that Vâlcea county is in first place, with 16 certified products, representing more than half of the regional total. This concentration is due in particular to the producer "Ca Altădată", which obtained numerous certifications for meat preparations such as sausages, caltaboși, drumstick, pork loin and smoked bacon.

Gorj and Dolj counties follow in importance, with seven and three traditional products respectively, both emphasizing pork preparations and, in particular, products from the Mangalița breed, recognized for the superior quality of meat. In Olt, two products based on vegetables and fruits were certified – zacusca with eggplant from Giuvărăști and dried plums from Leleasca –, while in Mehedinți, a single product was registered, the traditional Braga drink "La Bairam" .

In terms of food categories, meat and meat products clearly predominate , accounting for 23 of the 29 certifications. This high

share confirms that the Oltenia culinary tradition is closely linked to meat preparations, especially pork, smoked and seasoned according to old recipes. Categories such as beverages, bakery products or vegetable and fruit preparations are represented to a much lesser extent, but they bring added diversity and local specificity. In conclusion, the year 2020 can be considered a peak moment for Vâlcea County, which has demonstrated a constant concern for the certification of traditional products and the promotion of local culinary heritage.

Table 2, entitled "Certificates of traditional products registered in Oltenia, in the period 2021–2025" , captures the evolution and diversification of traditional products in the region in the following years. During this period, 13 new products were certified, which, although representing a smaller number compared to 2020, reflects a clear trend of thematic and geographical expansion.

In 2021 , only one product was certified in Mehedinți County – the fig jam "Trikule", which brings a touch of originality by capitalizing on local fruits. In 2022 , two products in the meat category were registered: "Oltenești Roses from Matra" from Olt and "Smoked Turkey Breast from Gigi's Garden" from Gorj, both examples of continuity of the tradition of culinary crafts.

The year 2023 is notable for an intense certification activity in Vâlcea County , where seven new products were registered, most of them traditional drinks. These come from the Ghiobesti area and include sour cherry, afinata, raspberry, apricot, pickled and tăuică, all obtained according to local recipes passed down from generation to generation. Thus, an increasingly pronounced orientation

towards the valorization of forest fruits and artisanal drinks is observed, which bring a new image to Oltenia gastronomy.

Table 1. Certificates of traditional products registered in Oltenia in 2020

No. Crt.	Year	County	Product category	Certified Product Name
1	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	CALTABOȘ OLTEDESC "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
2	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	JUMĂRI DE PORC "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
3	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	CÂRNAȚI DIN TOPOR "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
4	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	TOBĂ ȚĂRĂNEASCĂ "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
5	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	CÂRNAȚI CU AMBĂȚ "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
6	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	SLĂNINĂ USTUROIATĂ "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
7	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	CARNE AFUMATĂ LA GARNIȚĂ "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
8	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	MUȘCHI PERPELIT "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
9	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	CÂRNAȚI CU MIROASE DE USTUROI "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
10	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	CÂRNAȚI PĂSTOREȘTI "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
11	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	CEAFĂ PERPELITĂ "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
12	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	PULPĂ PERPLEITĂ "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
13	2020	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	DROB OLTEDESC "CA ALTĂDATĂ"
14	2020	Vâlcea	Beverage	ȚUICĂ ȚĂRIA LUI CĂTĂLIN
15	2020	Vâlcea	Beverage	RACHIU DIN FRUCTE ȚĂRIA LUI CĂTĂLIN
16	2020	Vâlcea	Bread and bakery products, pastries	"TĂIȚEI DE CASĂ STÂNA ȘTEFANU"
17	2020	Dolj	Meat and meat products	BURTICAN DE MANGALIȚĂ – FERMA LU GHIRȚĂ
18	2020	Dolj	Meat and meat products	CÂRNAȚI TRANDAFIRI DE MANGALIȚĂ – FERMA LU GHIRȚĂ
19	2020	Dolj	Meat and meat products	PIEPT OLTEDESC DE MANGALIȚĂ – FERMA LU GHIRȚĂ
20	2020	Mehedinți	Other	BRAGĂ "LA BAIRAM"
21	2020	Gorj	Meat and meat products	PIEPT ȚĂRĂNESC "LA TOMA"
22	2020	Gorj	Meat and meat products	CEAFĂ AFUMATĂ "LA TOMA"
23	2020	Gorj	Meat and meat products	CÂRNAȚI TRADIȚIONALI "LA TOMA"
24	2020	Gorj	Meat and meat products	CALTABOȘI "LA TOMA"
25	2020	Gorj	Meat and meat products	ȘUNCULIȚĂ CU BOIĂ ȘI ARDEI "LA TOMA"
26	2020	Gorj	Meat and meat products	PASTRAMĂ PORC "LA TOMA"
27	2020	Gorj	Meat and meat products	ȘUNCULIȚĂ "LA TOMA"
28	2020	Olt	Vegetables-Fruits	ZACUSCĂ CU VINETE DE GIUVĂRĂȘTI
29	2020	Olt	Vegetables-Fruits	PRUNE USCATE DE LELEASCA

Table 2. Certificates of traditional products registered in Oltenia, between 2021 - 2025

No. Crt.	Year	County	Product categories	Certified Product Name
1	2021	Mehedinți	Vegetables-Fruits	DULCEATĂ DE SMOCHINE "TRIKULE"
2	2022	Olt	Meat and meat products	TRANDAFIRII OLTENEȘTI DE MATRA
3	2022	Gorj	Meat and meat products	PIEPT DE CURCAN AFUMAT DIN OGRADA LUI GIGI
4	2023	Vâlcea	Beverage	MURATĂ DE GHIOBEȘTI
5	2023	Vâlcea	Beverage	VIȘINATĂ DE GHIOBEȘTI
6	2023	Vâlcea	Beverage	AFINATĂ DE GHIOBEȘTI
7	2023	Vâlcea	Beverage	ZMEURATĂ DE GHIOBEȘTI
8	2023	Vâlcea	Beverage	ȚUICĂ DE GHIOBEȘTI
9	2023	Vâlcea	Beverage	CAISATĂ DE GHIOBEȘTI
10	2023	Vâlcea	Meat and meat products	SALAM DE CASĂ LOVIȘTEA
11	2025	Olt	Milk and dairy products	BRÂNZĂ MATURATĂ DIN LAPTE DE CAPRĂ - FERMA DOMNIȚE
12	2025	Olt	Milk and dairy products	CAȘ MATURATĂ DIN LAPTE DE CAPRĂ - FERMA DOMNIȚE
13	2025	Olt	Milk and dairy products	URDĂ DE CAPRĂ - FERMA DOMNIȚE

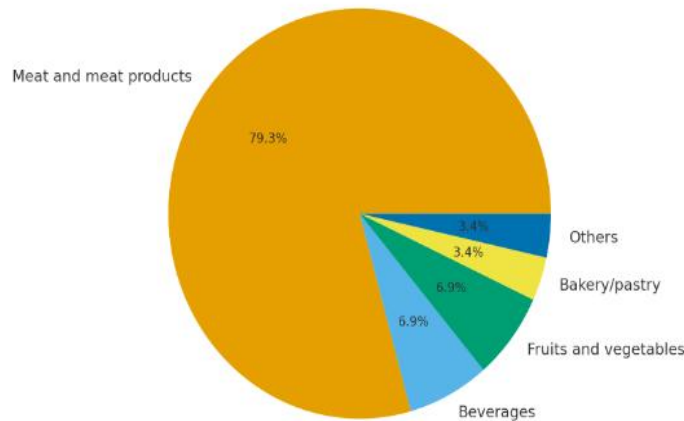


Figure 1. Structure of traditional products by category (2020-2025)

In 2025 , Olt County stands out by certifying three dairy products – cheese, curd and aged goat’s milk curd – obtained at Domnițe Farm . This development highlights a change of direction in the traditional local industry, where goat’s milk and aged products are becoming increasingly appreciated for their nutritional qualities and authentic taste. Comparing the two tables, one can observe a transition from the dominance of meat products (in 2020) to a diversification of the range of traditional products in the following years , including beverages, jams and dairy products. This change reflects the maturation of the sector and

the openness of local producers to the demands of modern consumers, who increasingly appreciate the diversity, naturalness and authenticity of food. At the same time, Vâlcea County maintains its position as a regional leader, demonstrating a continuity of gastronomic tradition and a high capacity to adapt to current trends in the food industry. Overall, the data presented show that Oltenia has significant development potential in the field of traditional products, and the growing interest in certification and promotion confirms that local traditions can be effectively capitalized on in a modern economic context.



Figure 2. Evolution of certified traditional products in oltenia (2020–2025)

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of Romanian traditional products certified in the Oltenia region during the period 2020–2025 highlighted a rich and diverse culinary landscape, in which local tradition increasingly intertwines with modern trends in the food industry. In total, 42 traditional products certified in the region were identified, of which 29 belong to the year 2020 and 13 to the period 2021–2025.

The results show that Vâlcea county clearly stands out for the largest number of traditional products — 16 certifications in 2020 alone and 7 more new ones in 2023, totaling 23 products, approximately 55% of the region's total. This concentration is explained by the constant activity of local producers, especially through the brands "Ca Altădată" and "Ghiobești", which promote authentic recipes for sausages, caltaboși, smoked products and traditional drinks.

In second place is Gorj County, with 8 certified products (19% of the total), followed by Olt with 5 products (12%), Dolj with 3 products (7%) and Mehedinți with 2 products (5%). This distribution highlights a strong core of culinary tradition in the mountainous and sub-Carpathian areas of Oltenia, with a lower but growing activity in the plain areas.

In terms of product categories, the structure is clearly dominated by meat and meat products, which total 26 certifications, representing approximately 62% of the total. This is followed by traditional beverages (8 products, 19%), milk and dairy products (3 products, 7%), vegetables and fruits (3 products, 7%) and bakery/pastry (1 product, 2%).

This share confirms that the Oltenia gastronomic specificity is closely linked to pork processing, but recent trends show an obvious diversification towards

artisanal beverages, dairy products and vegetable preserves.

The analysis of the temporal evolution shows a sharp decrease in the number of certifications after 2020, followed by a gradual relaunch. If in 2020 29 products were registered, in 2021 only one, in 2022 two, in 2023 a jump to seven products was recorded, and in 2025 – three new certifications. This dynamic confirms that the certification process is influenced by administrative and economic factors, but also by the growing interest of producers for the official recognition of their products. The diversification trend is evident in the years 2023–2025. In Vâlcea County, the traditional Ghiobești drinks – sour cherry, afinata, raspberry, apricot and țuica – have become a symbol of the revalorization of local fruit resources, representing almost 50% of all new products certified during this period. At the same time, in Olt County, Ferma Domnițe introduced three matured dairy products made from goat milk to the market, marking a new direction in the development of traditional gastronomy.

In conclusion, the study shows that the Oltenia region has a high potential for valorization of traditional products, both through their diversity and through their ability to adapt to the demands of the modern market. Although meat products continue to hold the supremacy, more and more producers are turning to new segments, such as natural beverages and artisanal dairy products.

By expanding the certification process, promoting through gastronomic festivals and including in modern distribution chains, these products can become authentic ambassadors of Romanian cultural and culinary identity.

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