

*Typical and traditional productions:
Rural effect and agro-industrial problems
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**Fruit and vegetables of typical local areas:
consumers' perception and valorization strategies
through distributors and producers.**

ABSTRACT

This paper presents some research results and elements, as matter for thought, about valorization strategies for regional typical fresh fruit and vegetables. Surveys conducted in hypermarkets highlighted the consumers' interest for this kind of products, which convey positive and reassuring images. Interviews with people in charge of mass distribution showed that distributors pay greater attention to these products, that can serve their strategic objectives. Producers must, however, prove their organization and quality management abilities, to meet distributors' quality and organization requirements. The following conclusions can be drawn from the study: even if regional typical fruit and vegetables are presently representing interesting outlets, their valorization can be hampered by certain limits. The promotion possibilities among consumers, the interest shown by distributors, and the risks taken by producers may be considered as those limits.

Nowadays, the sector of fruit and vegetables is facing a sharp competition. Among the different factors explaining this situation, one can state the increase in productivity, registered during these last decades, the internationalization of exchanges, as well as the broad choice proposed to the consumers. French fruit and vegetables are thus in competition with importation products, in or out of season periods. Moreover, fruit are subjected to the competition of yoghurts, ice creams, and other milked desserts, which take advantage of innovation and promotion strategies, developed by the main agro-food companies.

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Considering the saturation of the market, an increasing number of farmers try to attach to their products a comparative advantage, in the form of differentiation. To reach this aim, they use various quality criteria, such as the quality of taste, an environmentally sound crop production system, service quality, etc... Indeed a differentiation often appears for agricultural farms - that are in general small or very small companies - as the only mean to survive, in a competitive environment, in which big firms, especially those dealing with mass distribution, have the power to impose their norms [6]. This is particularly crucial in regions where natural characteristics do not enable farmers to lower their production costs, in order to enhance the competitiveness of their firm.

For several years, numerous differentiation approaches for agricultural products have been based on their typical character and belonging to a region. In France, it often comes down to laying emphasis on the notion of "typical local area" (the french notion of "terroir"), an expression describing a geographical entity, especially characterized by its soil and climate, which give to the products that are grown there, particular characteristics, and generally a superior quality. The typical local area is in France a popular notion, referring a lot to its wine tradition: therefore the classification of vintages and the attribution of the french A.O.C. (Controlled Denomination of Origin) are based on precise zonings.

However, the originality a typical local area brings to a product can only lead to a differentiation, if clients recognize its value [7]. Thus we have studied the potentialities offered by fruit and vegetables from the typical local area among their buyers: on the one hand in defining the final client's or consumer's perception of fruit and vegetables from typical local area; and on the other hand, in stressing the use of the notion of typical local area, through store brands for mass distribution. The information elements collected outline the assets and limits when dealing with typical local fruit and vegetables, and enable to determine certain conditions for their valorization by producers.

1. FRENCH CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLE OF TYPICAL LOCAL AREAS.

In the present context of internationalization of exchanges concerning food products, we could think that consumers' tastes tend to an uniformization, and that their interest in regional or typical local items is faltering. But it is not the case. Indeed, the works undertaken by the Observatory of Food Consumptions show that, in France, some regional disparities in food consumption are still existing [3]. These researchs enlightened the existence of "food regions", characterized by certain specified practices and food choices. Fruit and vegetables are not the most discriminant to differentiate these "food regions". But the author concluded that through products from typical local areas, and differentiated culinary traditions, "the regional cultures are resisting" and continue to influence food consumption. Nevertheless, the rural zones seem to achieve a better differentiation, in the field of food, because culinary traditions and alimentary tastes are better transmitted between generations. Conversely, urbanization seems to contribute to uniformization of people's tastes.

We have conducted surveys among consumers, in order to get to know their perception of regional fruit and vegetables, to precise their understanding of the expression "typical local area", and the images they associate to it, and to measure the impact a regional brand can have on the

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buying act. Two surveys were led in the fruit and vegetable department in a hypermarket located in the Parisian region, one in May 1996, and the other one in July 1996 ; they were dealing with the marketing respectively of cherries and apricots, sold under a regional brand ("Goûtez l'Ardèche"). A third survey was undertaken in the fruit and vegetable department of a hypermarket situated in Aix-en-Provence region, in October 1996 ; it was just after a period of promotion of the Provence region organized by this store. These surveys made it possible to interview 221, 229, and 700 persons respectively, that is as a whole 1150 consumers.

1.1 The images linked to the typical local area

In these three surveys, we have asked consumers what was for them the meaning of the typical local area. In the first two surveys, the question was open, and the answers have been grouped together afterwards according to the subjects mentioned.

For a part of the consumers being interviewed, the typical local area means only typical local products from a region, without any judgement concerning the value. Conversely, a great number of interviews suggested some positive views concerning the notion of typical local area. Thus the typical local area is often related to quality : quality of products, freshness, good taste, but also soil quality, quality of life. The favourable influence of the environment on the product quality was also stated : adaptation of a production to a given region, the importance of sun for the quality. The typical local area also raised the notions of being natural, true, genuine, "non trafficked" products, healthy and natural food items. Certain consumers associated it with nature, the "real" countryside, the quietness...

The typical local area aroused also a reassuring reference to the past : therefore it evoked traditions, origins, agricultural methods of the past, and craft industry - opposed to industrial manufacturing -, the "home-made" notion, the respect of ancient uses. Certain persons felt themselves personally linked to the typical local when recalling their roots and youth. There was also a notion of french or regional patrimony, attached to the typical local area, a patrimony seen by certain consumers as threatened and that they wanted to protect. Certain answers from people interviewed mentioned "french appellations and labels", certifying the quality of certain products. We only met a very tiny number of consumers who criticized the present use of this notion : these few persons were thinking that this expression was fashionable, trite and without any real meaning, because of the uniformization of agricultural practices.

In the third survey, the definition of the typical local area was tackled with a method of a closed question, and a choice of six possible answers was proposed to consumers, the different modalities of choice should be classified in rank of importance. It seemed that the typical local area means, first of all, the belonging to a region (31 % of the answers), then come the genuineness and the traditional know-how (24 %), the quality (19 %) and the countryside (14 %). The two other answers proposed - "local farmers" and "the existence of controls" - were rarely stated in the first place (respectively 8 % and 2 % of the answers), but amounted for a higher proportion of answers of the second choice and beyond.

1.2 How do the consumers characterize fruit and vegetables from typical local areas?

Beforehand it is worth noticing that fruit and vegetable, in a general manner, are relatively rarely associated to the notion of typical local product : when consumers are asked about those products, wines, cheeses and cooked meals were first mentioned. Moreover, for certain fruit, the reference to the typical local area seems to present less interest to the consumers : that is the case of cherry, which is produced in almost all the regions of France, and is in addition involving autoconsumption.

The consumers interviewed in the third survey should number eight criteria by rank of importance, in order to precise to which one they associate typical local products. The criteria the most highly associated to the typical local fruit were : a different taste or a better taste (24 % of statements), the quality (19 %), the freshness (16 %), and a higher price (12 %). The absence of chemical treatments and the notion of healthy product represented respectively 10% and 9 % of the statements, and it is interesting to state that these characteristics were ranked first, each of them, in 9 % of the statements. The fruit from a typical local area was a better controlled product in 8 % of the statements.

A remark concerning the price is worth mentioning : if a part of the consumers declared themselves ready to pay more for a product of quality, they did not admit that a local or regional reference would lead to a higher price, if the product was not of good quality.

1.3 Who are the consumers interested in fruit and vegetable from a typical local area?

The knowledge of certain socio-demographical data concerning the interviewed persons enabled to characterize the consumers having an interest for fruit and vegetables from typical local areas. The region from which the consumers are originated did not seem to influence their interest for a typical local area, but other characteristics proved to be discriminant.

Thus consumers over 50, were more aware of the notion of typical local area : we met less people of that age without any opinion, in comparison with the rest of the studied population. Conversely, the youngest persons had more difficulties to talk about the notion of typical local area, and to state regional products.

The socioprofessionnal category also significantly influence the interest towards typical local products : the retired, the executives, and the people having intellectual professions were the categories the most interested in products from typical local areas. In the contrary, employees and workers were less motivated by these products.

1.4 Is the origin of fruit an important purchasing criterion?

When being asked if the origin of fruit they buy seems to them important, as far as quality is concerned, 80 % of consumers answered positively. The people interviewed justified their answer, mentioning the weather, sun, adaptation of a production to a region, agricultural practices adapted to quality. Nevertheless, when interviewed about their purchasing criteria for fruit, consumers indicated they first chose fruit according to their exterior aspect and firmness, that could be a sign of a certain intrinsic quality of the product : let us take for example the cases of cherries, assessed

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through their firmness and freshness, apricots through their color and firmness. The origin ranked only fifth in their purchasing decision.

Thus, despite the interest stated by consumers for the origin of fruit and typical local products, their first purchasing criterion for fruit was certainly not the origin. Similarly, few persons were capable, during the two last surveys, to state the origin of the fruit they had just bought, whereas some posters, placed close to the price slate, stressed the region of production. Among the persons having noticed the origin of fruit, the 25 - 49 age group was less represented, compared to the whole interviewed population, what confirmed the tinier interest from the young population in this type of information.

1.5 Conclusion : a favourable perception of regional fruit and vegetables, but not much integrated in the purchasing behaviours

The typical local area undoubtedly enjoys a positive image among a majority of consumers. This notion evokes quality - product quality, farmers' know-how, life quality -, and that reassures arousing references to tradition. Although the typical local area is not spontaneously much associated to fruit and vegetables, consumers seem to be ready to grant their preference to local or regional fruit and vegetables, if they are of good quality.

However, the interest aroused by local or regional fruit and vegetables must be kept under certain proportions, because the origin does not appear as an important purchasing criterion and the consumers are most of the time incapable of stating the origin of fruit they have just chosen. Moreover, all consumers do not show an identical interest either for the origin of fruit or the notion of typical local area. People belonging to the superior age groups, as well as the retired, the executives, and the intellectual professions, represent the categories of consumers the most interested in the origin of fruit and typical local products. In the contrary, the youngest consumers seem to be less motivated by typical local areas, they in fact know less. However, they could be interested by other facets of fruit quality, such as their nutritional values ; it would seem that they attach more importance than their elders to official designations guaranteed by the french "labels" and "denominations of origin."

The quality being guaranteed or not by an official designation of quality, the valorization of fruit and vegetables of typical local areas, is thus only possible if consumers can find an objectively better quality or a marked typicality.

2. THE MASS DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY FACED TO TYPICAL LOCAL OR REGIONAL FRUIT AND VEGETABLES.

Mass distribution, in the field of fresh fruit and vegetables, does not reach the same level of market share, compared to other food sectors. Although ranking first, it has to cope with the competition of traditional distribution channels, such as specialized shops and markets. Indeed, if consumers do their shopping in hypermarkets, beforehand for practical reasons, they often remain deceived by the quality of fruit they find there [1]. The companies involved in mass distribution are

thus developing some strategies intended to improve their image towards consumers, and in particular, to supply the fruit and vegetables department with the quality reputation it lacks of.

We organized in 1996 some surveys among mass distribution companies or fulltime wholeselling firms, and the persons interviewed were chosen either at the national, regional or local level. These surveys, without being exhaustive, bring some elements of information on the vision the people in charge of mass distribution of regional and local products may have, and on the manner these products integrate into the "quality" strategy developed by companies.

2.1 A more or less broad vision of the typical local area

For the vegetables, except some typical regional products of long notoriety and coming from very small areas, the typical local area is first of all linked to a local origin : the proximity between the production site and the store or the purchasing center, enables to reduce transportation and favour freshness, a major quality expected for these products.

But for fruit the typical local area has a real meaning. To define this notion, the people in charge, being interviewed, insist on the link between the typical local area and the taste quality, as well as the producer's role, who, thanks to his know-how, contributes to generate quality. According to them, regional typical fruit and vegetables must possess a certain notoriety in order to be recognized as such by consumers, and their typicality must be clear, and have, if possible, an objective nature.

But in any case, whatever fruit or vegetables it may be, the typical local area, eventually likened to a regional or local origin, offers first of all to the distributor the possibility of obtaining the expected quality. Therefore, this strategic vision of typical local products underlines, not only the intrinsic qualities of the product, but also the producers' abilities to respect the requirements of mass distribution.

2.2 The strategy towards producers

In several firms we studied, the seeking for regional or local products is part of the strategy developed by the brand in the context of fresh fruit and vegetables quality. The information collected during interviews enlightened certain major elements of the strategy used by those store brands :

- ?? the necessity, for all of them, to situate within "the market price ";
- ?? the importance of "economic" criteria : for example to minimize the costs of logistics or losses, as well as non-quality costs;
- ?? the seeking for freshness, an essential quality expected for vegetables
- ?? the interest attached to french production, as well as to local and regional origins;
- ?? the necessity to find suppliers capable of meeting distributors' requirements.

The quality granted to the product by pedo-climatic particularities of a geographic area - more or less important -, as well as the producers' organizing abilities, represent for the distributor a mean to select the best fruit for each variety and to reach the level of quality required by the brand

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schedule of conditions. The registering of some producers, either independent or grouped within collective bodies, enables to guarantee, at higher stages, the respect of certain rules in the field of product quality, but also in the field of organization and logistics. Thus, certain distributors feel really concerned with official signs of quality recognition, that justify the product qualities, but also the organizing and managing abilities of production and marketing companies. If the typical local product benefits, in addition, from a notoriety, it is a "plus", which could contribute to its differentiation from the rest of the market.

The proximity of a purchasing center or a store, a priority objective as far as vegetables are concerned, is also expected, when it is possible, for fruit : to limit transportation is favourable to the preservation of quality for all fragile products. It enables also to reduce the costs of logistics, an essential strategic concern for mass distribution. Moreover, certain stores sometimes establish close links with local producers : the departmental supervisor or the person in charge of fruit and vegetables visits the farm, gets information on applied techniques, checks producer's organizing abilities, and some links can then be woven between persons, that could go far beyond the usual strictly commercial relationships.

Typical local products, if likened to a form of innovation, implies both the producer's and distributor's involvement, in order to contribute to its set-off and success among consumers [4], what confirms the necessary "complicity" between the different links of the commercial channel, expected by one of our interviewees.

These procedures lead to reduce the producers' systematic competition generated by distributors, who prefer more and more to deal with a small number of suppliers, with whom they will handle long term transactions, rather than "pull it off " without any follow-up.

We can describe this situation while referring to the "economy of conventions" [9]. The relationships between distributors and producers are first of all based on trade and industrial coordinations, because of the importance given to the price, and to the respect of "standards". Presently we are the witnesses of a sliding towards industrial-civilian or industrial-domestic coordinations : an interest is given to official certifications, quality is based on cultural data, such as typical local areas or the domestic origin, or on general principles in the context of environment protection and pollution control, or the building of relationships between a tiny number of people, for which the knowledge and mutual confidence take a real importance.

2.3 The strategy towards consumers

All the interviewed distributors agree that typical local products are nowadays a good way to bear a message across to the consumers. Typical local products, if valorized, are generally likened to high quality products, and can, as such, be sold at a higher price.

Mentioning the notion of typical local area is often a promotional argument in department stores. Store brands show an emphasis laid on french or regional products, and thus meet a certain chauvinism among the clients, as well as expectations some customers express in the context of the preservation of traditions and regional patrimony. In a general manner, certain distributors show their attachment to "citizen" values, as respect of traditions, priority given to french and regional products, preservation of small companies and employment or protection of the environment ; they must try to match the "say" and "do", and the promotion of typical local or regional products can

contribute to it. Moreover, the positive image expected for a store brand or a store itself, takes advantage of the values associated to typical local fruit and vegetables, such as tradition, genuineness, flavour and proximity.

2.4 In Conclusion

The results of surveys undertaken within mass distribution companies showed that typical local fruit and vegetables contribute to meet two main types of distributors' purchasing criteria. [7] :

- ?? the criteria of use, referring to the value really created for the client : we are dealing here with the reduction of logistical costs, losses, non-quality costs, a posteriori controls...
- ?? the criteria of signs used, which result from signs of value, such as advertising and notoriety ; they measure the value perceived by the client : we are here talking about positive images associated with typical local products, and which distributors can benefit from.

3. CONSEQUENCES FOR PRODUCERS : WHAT ARE THE POTENTIALITIES OF VALORIZATION OF TYPICAL LOCAL AND REGIONAL FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

3.1 Assets and Limits of typical regional fruit and vegetables

As already explained, regional fruit and vegetables arouse the interest of mass distribution and consumers. Thus it seems justified that producers should get a support from the image of their region, as well as from the origin and typicality of their products, in order to valorize them :

- ?? certain regions are favourable to the quality of certain fruit, and thanks to a good technicity, the producer, independently or collectively, can hope to obtain some typicality and quality in order to valorize his production, and even to obtain an official acknowledgment of quality : "label", certification, french or european controlled denomination of origin;
- ?? some groups of producers, localized in a given production zone, can set up an appropriate organization to market certain products, not especially typical ones, but nevertheless presenting some guaranties of origin and quality;
- ?? certain producers can take advantage of their proximity with purchasing centers or mass distribution stores, to obtain a reference classification through the store brand;
- ?? the producers involved in a way of differentiation for their products can take advantage of the interest shown by mass distribution to this kind of move, aiming at emphasizing the typicality and image of the product and region;
- ?? individually or grouped together, they can benefit from the will shown by several store brands to select a tiny number of suppliers and to establish with them durable relationships.

But the valorization of typical and regional fruit and vegetables has to cope with certain limits and can only be achieved under certain conditions.

Thus, it is clear that mass distribution does not intend either to develop a too restrictive regional supplying strategy, or to establish constraints, which would hamper its whole strategy. The people in charge of the sector, that we interviewed, clearly say : "the typical local area is not an

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end in itself, it is only a mean to get the requested quality ". As PACHE G. [5] remarks it : the reference classification of regional producers represents a possibility to diversify the supplies among others.

If the distributors are working on a special typical local area or region, it means that they find there the mean to satisfy their strategic objectives. In that context, the producers' abilities to meet qualitative and organisational requirements, represent an essential argument. The official signs of quality, such as the french label or AOC, are considered as a significant guaranty for distributors, who know, however, to remain critical towards certain products enjoying a sign of quality, assessing that the management of quality is not satisfying (fall in quality during the season, insufficient controls, variability of gustative quality within the production zone, etc...)

The distributors' will to implicate themselves more and more in the channel, as well as in regional productions, can also be translated in the long term, by a greater dependence upon suppliers, which could lead to a total integration. Moreover, and this problem is crucial, the regional products are often used to supply the distributor's brands, as already noted by PACHE G. [5]. Producers are losing their identity and some of them bitterly regret the fact that distributors do not present in their stores products under the producer's own name or under a sign of quality. But certain store brands, indeed, do not consider to valorize a typical local fruit, if they already have a high quality distributor brand.

The distributors we interviewed, mentioned themselves certain limits that present, to their eyes, regional fruit and vegetables. Thus it seems difficult for some of them to valorize an isolated product and not a range : regional fruit and vegetables can more easily be promoted within regional promotion operations, together with craft industry products and other foodstuffs. In addition, all fruit cannot be valorized thanks to their origin, because the link between quality and origin is not always obvious. Several interviews highlighted the risks of interregional competition, and the fact that proliferation of regional brands could make the notion of typical local area common place. Thus one of our interviewees said the following : "too much is harmful". These concerns can be linked to the fears expressed by the INAO (National French Institute of Denomination of Origin), during its last conference in May 1996.

The distributors also consider the limits that regional fruit and vegetables present towards consumers. Indeed, some of them think that the consumers' passion for typical local areas partly results from a fashion amplified by medias. Concerning consumption surveys stated above : if they confirmed the consumers' deep interest for tradition and genuineness inherent to typical local products, they also showed that all consumers cannot be attracted by these products. We have also stated that the youngest consumers on the one hand, and those belonging to the categories of employees and workers, on the other hand, show less interest for typical regional products: lower financial means, tinier knowledge of regional productions, less time to look at tags and information on points of sale, weaker transmission of culinary patrimony in urban area, represent elements that reduce the impact possibilities of typical regional products on the consumers.

Besides, it is difficult to promote a typical local area that is far from the selling region, especially if similar products can be traditionnally found in this region. Finally, fruit and vegetables of typical local areas must enjoy a certain notoriety and be easy to identify for the consumers. As products of high quality, they should bring "something more" to them, so that a higher price could be accepted. : beyond the image associated to typical local areas, an attractive exterior aspect and a good

gustative quality, one could think of an adapted packaging, a comfort of use, the guaranty that production technics preserve environment, etc...

3.2 Developing Conditions of Differentiation Strategies based on Origin for the fresh Fruit and Vegetables Producers

If typical and regional fruit and vegetables interest distributors and consumers, it is not at any condition, and the mushrooming of regional brands cannot but strengthen the idea of a stricter selection by the market.

It is important for producers to be able to meet customers' expectations. The downstream channel asks for more guaranties concerning not only the quality of products, but also the producers' organizing capacities. Typical local areas, as pedo-climatic unity, is insufficient to enable the product valorization : it is through collaboration between agricultural firms that an economic validity of the regional typical product can be reached, through a construction and a rigorous management of quality, and finding eventually a basis in the historical legitimacy of typical local areas and their notoriety [2] [10]. It is only by paying that cost that producers can satisfy qualitative and organizing requirements of distributors, and supply them with guaranties, concerning the origin of products, their level of gustative quality, the respect of logistical constraints, and, sometimes, the applied production technics.

Official quality recognition signs, bring, even if they are not obligatory, a proof of the producers' organizing abilities and of the quality level of their products : thus they can represent a positive argument towards distributors, and also enhance the credibility of the product among consumers. The multiplication of territorial valorization moves, by creating interregional competitions, risks, indeed, to increase consumers' requirements on quality and typicality, and thus on the requested price. But we must not forget that producers' brands, as well as quality signs, are in fact little known by consumers in the fresh fruit and vegetables sector : an efficient marketing strategy is therefore necessary, in order to make these products known, and to practice repeated business with consumers. Moreover, if a part of consumers really believe in typical local products, enlarging the clientele should involve adapted communication actions.

As previously said, the passion for typical local products among consumers, mainly results from the reassuring image they convey, as well as images of tradition, genuineness and quality attached to them. Other types of quality specifications could meet the consumers' wishes, and reassure them as far as their food quality is concerned : so the producers must remain aware of the evolutions concerning consumers' expectations; this should be followed by distributors, and one should not rely on the sole "typical regional product" argument : other concerns could strengthen in the next years, as the interest shown to food nutritional qualities, or environmentally sound crop production systems. Certain store brands of mass distribution already grant their support to these production practices, that could become an compulsory supplementary requirement in the future.

Besides, a typical regional fruit or vegetable can have a limited production in time : its seasonal nature, if it meets a certain consumer demand [8], makes product promotion and repeated business more costly and difficult. This seasonal nature seems acceptable, from the commercial point of view, if the product presents a real typicality and important notoriety. Conversely, if it is not the case, it seems more efficient to consider the valorization of a regional product range, likely to be

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able to make a region known, and to create repeated business with consumers, thanks to a long time presence in the stores.

Some study is needed to determine if mass distribution is the best commercial channel to valorize regional typical fruit and vegetables. The strategies presently developed by distributors seem favourable to the establishing of durable relationships with their suppliers. In big stores, this context can contribute to the valorization of local products available in tiny volumes, or make some small producers known. But the image of regional products risks also to be won over by store brands instead, without any possibility for producers of keeping their identity. The pressure on prices, practised by distributors, can also limit producers' interest. But do farmers have really the choice ? In France, markets and specialized fruit and vegetables' shops still represent a significant part of the market, and keep their image of quality towards consumers, that is often lacking at the fruit and vegetables department in hypermarkets : the valorization of typical fruit and vegetables can thus be partly performed through these proximity commercial channels. However, the growth observed in mass distribution pushes producers to sell their products in department stores.

An analysis of contracts between distributors and producers in the context of local and regional moves for production valorization, as well as a follow-up of strategic objectives from different actors, in function of local and global constraints, would be necessary to assess more precisely the advantages and drawbacks met by producers in this type of transactions.

CONCLUSION

The regional typical products represent an important stake at all levels of the fresh fruit and vegetables channel. Through these products, producers outline their intrinsic quality, as well as the quality of the typical local area, which they are able to benefit from, thanks to their know-how. Mass distribution firms multiply their promotions of regional products, stating consumers' passion for them. For political decision-makers, the stake is also the following : to favour the maintaining of an economical sustainable activity in certain regions, suffering from agricultural land abandonment.

In this context, the typicality and favourable image of typical local products supply some basis for differentiation, in the sector of fresh fruit and vegetables. Despite the internationalization of exchanges, regional products do interest consumers, and reassure them, thanks to the image of tradition and genuineness they convey. These products must however present objective guaranties of quality to justify a higher price, and not mislead consumers. Nevertheless, the valorization potentialities of typical and regional fruit and vegetables must be kept under certain proportions : indeed, consumers are not similarly aware of these products. Moreover, if they say they are interested in fruit origin, this parameter does not presently represent a significant purchasing criterion. Finally, faced to the multiplication of brands and quality denominations based on origin, there is a risk that the typical local area notion becomes trite.

Several firms of mass distribution now consider typical and regional fruit and vegetables as interesting supplying sources. Indeed, these firms find in them the possibility to improve their performances : thanks to the lowering of logistics costs, respect of quality guaranties aiming at a smoothening of losses, non-quality costs, and a posteriori controls; but also because typical local products make store brands, or stores themselves, benefit from positive images they convey among consumers. The new technologies of information exchanges, as the computerized data exchanges, contribute to facilitate the introduction of local products, despite decision centralizing.

The valorization of regional fruit and vegetables in mass distribution presents some limits : the overcost, possible in a strategy based on market segmentation, must, on the one hand, remain compatible with mass distribution objectives ; on the other hand, these products, if sold under the distributor's brand, are at a risk of losing their own identity. Finally, distributors do not wish to remain confined into a restrictive vision of typical local area, and are largely motivated by producers' organizing capacities : working independently, or organized within collective moves, the later must meet qualitative and organizing constraints imposed by the distributors. An official sign of quality recognition, such as the french "label", a product conformity certification or a denomination of origine, can bring the proof of the producers' organizing abilities.

Outlining origin and typicality could be seen as an opportunity of differentiation for fresh fruit and vegetables, due to the interest shown by mass ditribution and consumers. However, it is necessary that producers remain vigilant, as far as the evolution of clients' expectations is concerned, especially considering the increasing concern towards environmentally sound crop production systems.

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