


Chapter 22

International Competitiveness of Niche Agricultural Products: Case of Honey Production in Serbia

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ABSTRACT

The subject of the study is the analysis of honey production in Fruska Gora. Specifically, the authors determine the possibilities of honey production in the monasteries of Fruska Gora and the possibilities of increasing production and its impact on rural development. The chapter introduces the readers to the sector of honey production and sale in the monasteries of Fruska Gora, as well as to the problems related to the procurement of production material, state of marketing, and engagement of human resources. Since the monasteries represent sacred places, honey produced in such an environment can be considered a unique and special product. The authors reveal the factors which have a restrictive effect on the development of the honey sector in a specified geographical area, as well as explore the significance and role of production growth in the economic development of both the sector and the area.

INTRODUCTION

People live together with nature and therefore it is important to preserve resources and use them in a sustainable manner. In past few years, sensitive eco-system in Serbia has been significantly violated. The decrease of population in active working age has been registered in rural areas, as well as the aging trend, the disturbed educational structure, and the decrease of productivity and efficiency of agricultural production. All those issues mean the challenges for using the comparative natural conditions for pro-

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duction, use of available production capacities, and intensifying agricultural production for the needs of domestic market and export.

Serbia disposes favorable natural conditions, relatively unpolluted resources, moderate continental climate, and abundance of honey plants. Honey production is constantly growing. Nevertheless, the production of honey in rural area of Vojvodina, especially in the monasteries in Fruska Gora, is at the pre-transitional level. Development of this market segment would contribute to the improvement of overall supply and export of honey, as well as the development of rural territories.

In this chapter, the authors studied Fruska Gora monastery honey as one of the segments of honey market in Serbia. Both global and Serbian markets of honey have been increasing constantly. Consumption patterns and preferences have been changing, that is why the understanding of this market is of exceptional importance. In the Background section, the authors introduce a reader to a structure and dynamics of honey production at the monasteries of Fruska Gora, and a role of beekeeping in rural development of Vojvodina and Serbia. The authors demonstrate that honey manufactured in Fruska Gora monasteries can satisfy the specific needs of consumers (quality, psychography, etc.) which actually confirms the results of many prior studies on honey consumption (Čirić, Ignjatijević, & Cvijanović, 2015; Ignjatijević et al., 2019). Moreover, Fruska Gora monastery honey has a potential for branding and distinguishability on the domestic and international markets. The authors reveal the factors which restrict the development of honey sector in a limited geographical area of Fruska Gora. They also demonstrate a significance and role of increasing production in a market niche to the economic development of both honey sector and the area. This chapter discusses the findings of many previous studies which analyzed honey production issues internationally. In the Solutions and Recommendations section, the authors summarize the recommendations and discuss them across the findings of many scholars of different economic, political, cultural, and religious beliefs. Issues of honey production in monasteries have not been explored to date, whether it was about the context of rural development or creating a niche market strategy. Therefore, the conclusions of this research can be of particular interest to the scholars in the region of South-East Europe. In particular, it should be emphasized that the research results represent a starting point for further development of this market segment and creating a strategy for improvement of the competitiveness of Serbian honey in the domestic and international markets.

BACKGROUND

Most of the studies published internationally deal with the competitiveness of national economies in general and beekeeping sector in particular. There have been few studies related to the analysis of the competitiveness of niche agricultural products, especially the monastery honey as the market niche of honey sector. In Serbia, few authors have explored the significance of monasteries in the spiritual and cultural development of Serbian identity, and when it comes to their empowerment or contribution to the economic development, a number of studies is almost negligible; in fact, there is only few similar studies in the world. As Della Fave and Hillery (1980) stated, it was important that a monastery was economically self-sustainable, with the fact that the economic empire was subordinated to the religious one. Regarding that monasteries exist as the longest intra-national living communities they should offer some valuable traces (monastery products are certainly the examples of such goods).

Klimova (2011) pointed out that the monasteries were “the social world foundations” and helped in their empowerment by the transfer of religious knowledge and institutional refinements. Exactly, monas-

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