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Export Success Factors for Table Olives: The Perception of Greek Exporting Firms

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Abstract

Greece has a long tradition as a producer of table olives and is the second largest producer and exporter of edible olives in the European Union. The current economic crisis in combination with the local market' small size has forced Greek companies to expand to international markets the past few years.

The aim of this research paper is to examine the perceptions of Greek table olive exporters, regarding export success factors. The qualitative research method was used and 7 interviews were conducted with well-established table olive exporters. The interviews are structured and in the first part the exporters' profile is examined (export experience, size, quantities exported, trade partners' characteristics). In the second part their perception regarding product's properties (taste, aroma, etc.). The last section examines the table olive exporters' perception of the market trends (consumption patterns, market segments, etc.).

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1. Introduction

Exports are very important for the Greek economy and contribute 29% to the country's GDP, while food exports have increased by 22.63% during the 2008-2014 period (Panhellenic Exports Association, 2014; 2015). The Greek table olive sector is the second largest in the world following Spain (FAOSTAT, 2011). There are 30 million trees for table olives in Greece and 80.000 tons are exported in 80 countries worldwide. The value of table olives accounts for 6.5% of the Greek Agricultural products and 1.3% of the total Greek exports (Business & Innovation Center of Attica, 2012).

A reason for the recent increase of Greek food exports is the economic recession, which has resulted to the shrinkage of the domestic market due to the decrease of the consumers' purchasing power. Thus, businesses in order to survive they had to expand to international markets. Another reason is the strong interest regarding the Mediterranean diet, as consumers become more aware of its health benefits. Finally the Mediterranean diet has recently been acknowledged as part of the cultural heritage of Greece, Italy, Morocco and Spain (UNESCO, 2013).

For many centuries, table olives were part of the Greek culture and diet. A study of over 100 food products, including the Kalamon variety, black, green and wrinkled olives from various regions across Greece confirmed that Greek traditional food is exceptionally nutritious and healthy (Vasilopoulou et al., 2013).

Despite the sector's great economic importance, little emphasis has been given to the export success factors of table olives either in Greece or in other countries. This exploratory research is a pilot study since it is, to the best of our knowledge, the first that examines the export success factors for table olives. A qualitative approach is used to analyze seven Greek table olives exporters and their perception on various factors affecting their success.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Greek food exports

The main target markets for Greek food exports are developed countries such as Germany, France, Canada, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom and lately, there is an increased interest for the US market. Although markets like Russia, Turkey, Brazil, China and India, are also of great interest, they have not yet been exploited by the Greek food exporters. The targeted consumers are mainly individuals of medium to high income and of high socio-cultural level; thus they are more aware of the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet and are willing to pay higher prices. In addition, the fact that the products are from Greece (country of origin effect) has a positive impact on their purchasing decision. As Lakasas states in the work of Bizmpiroulas & Rotsios (2014), "*There is a huge value in the name 'Greece'. Our country is full of unique products that combine quality, taste and nutritional value.*"

Labels such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) are used by the EU, to promote and protect the image and reputation of food products, their authenticity and their heritage. Many studies have shown the positive impact of these labels (Menapace et al., 2011; Aprile et al., 2012). A study by Erraach et al. (2014) on Spanish consumers and their preference of olive oil, found that price and PDO certification are the two most important factors that affect the consumers purchases.

2.2. Factors motivating exports

Firms get involved with exports for various reasons, such as the size or saturation of local markets, the attractiveness of new markets, the development of new products, lower costs, etc. According to Liargovas (2010) "Export performance is the relative success or failure of the efforts of a firm or nation to sell domestically-produced goods and services to other nations". There are several success factors that enhance export performance. A success factor is defined as a set of elements that consent to the firm to operate in a profitable and sustainable way, in order to reach its objectives and goals (Caralli et al., 2004). Thus, export success factors allow firms to achieve their export related goals and objectives.

In an attempt to identify the export success factors Gemunden (1988), analyzed 50 research studies and critically reviewed them. He found that there is a limiting connection between the company's size and its exporting potential. These findings are further supported by several researchers (Wolff & Pett, 2000; Stoian, et al., 2010) who found that

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