

THE CASE OF THE PDO AND PGI LABELS IN THE CROATIAN MARKET

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ABSTRACT

This research is a first step towards outlining the profile and motives of Croatian producers concerning their PDO/PGI food production practices. This paper is aimed at the producers' perception of the success of protected products production as well as of marketing activities used to enhance the success of such products. The primary research method employed for the study was in-depth interviews with 17 producers of PDO olive oil and 6 PGI Dalmatian prosciuttos. Research results showed that protected product producers find that their biggest problem is an insufficient education of Croatian producers on PDO/PGI labels and high costs needed for the product protection and control process. Bureaucracy and costs of implementation, together with a lack of consumer knowledge, are likely to prevent rapid future adoption in the Croatia. However, producers of both types of products consider that greater success requires greater investments into marketing activities during a longer period of time. The paper concludes with several observations drawn from the data as well as implications for managers and researchers.

KEY WORDS: protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, food products, producers, Croatia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The adoption of different quality assurance schemes, such as the Protected Denomination of Origin/Geographical Indication (PDO/PGI) by the European Union, has been a response to the growing demand for certified quality food products among consumers. Fotopolus and Krystallis (2003) offered some more insights into the effectiveness of the PDO scheme and its acceptance by the consumer. In general consumers do not read and assimilate all the information available, as they are highly selective and only retain the pieces of information that are relevant for them (Ares & Deliza, 2010; Guerrero 2001; Acebrón & Dopico 2000). The expiry date and the commercial brand are the most frequently read information on the label, although other aspects such as the ingredients, the nutritional composition, or the origin are also important. A high percentage of consumers are interested in the origin of the products that they consume. For instance, about 40% of Spanish consumers are concerned about the origin of the products that they buy (Guerrero, 2001). In general, most consumers show a certain degree of sensitivity towards food origins. The major benefit of a product's strong label is that it acts as a signal of product quality and directly affects the likelihood of purchase (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012).

The PDO/PGI labels are considered to be a significant cue in consumer choice behaviour because they have a significant effect on consumer product evaluation (Al-Sulaiti & Baker, 1998) and are important in buying decisions (Beverland and Lindgreen, 2002). Food producers and retailers respond to these changes by modifying and extending the variety of their food products (OECD, 1997). The use of Protected Denomination of Origin/Protected Geographical Indication (PDO/PGI) labels by food producers has become a marketing strategy very similar to branding. Such labels provide consumers with information on the area of production and thus imply originality and authenticity. Moreover, a total of 20 Croatian food products (10 PDO and 10 PGI) have been approved by the EU (Table 1). Given that the PDO/PGI scheme concerns

products complying with strict regulations, it results in enhanced product value; a PDO/PGI label makes a product more easily accepted by consumers. Furthermore, it transforms its quality characteristics from credence to search and decreases consumer risk regarding the quality of the regional product (Peri and Gaeta, 1999).

Although a PDO/PGI protection label adds value to regional products, there is one large problem, namely the lack of consumer awareness and understanding of the PDO/PGI protection label. Unless the consumer awareness and understanding of these labels is improved, the added value of PDO and PGI labels will be limited (Van Ittersum et al., 1999).

PDOs and PGIs, which have an official Commission logo (in blue and yellow), cover a wide range of food and drink products, from natural mineral water, beer and cider to meat, dairy and fish products, bread, pastries, cakes and confectionery. However, a number of conditions are attached and, among other things, producers must use product names which have a geographical descriptor and are thus linked to a specific area; specify methods of production and provide historical evidence which links the product to a specific area; and have the product inspected to ensure that the requirements of registered specifications are met.

Even though the products with protected labels effect has received considerable attention in research, current knowledge is still limited (Mai, 2011). Areas where knowledge is still lacking include effects of those labels for products and services originating from non-industrialized countries and how these products are perceived in emerging markets. The aim of this paper is to investigate perceptions of producers one PDO and one PGI product in Croatia – their current status and supply chain of those products. More specifically, the paper seeks to understand a little more about the characteristics of the early adopters of PDOs/PGIs, the reasons for their application, and the possible impacts of PDO/PGI status on their marketing strategies.

2. (PDO/PGI) PRODUCT PROTECTION PROCESS IN CROATIA

The provisions of the Regulation (EU) No. 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21st November 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs provided for a legal framework for protection of the names of traditional agricultural products and foodstuffs, whose characteristics or specific production methods are a consequence of human and natural factors of a specific geographic region. This Regulation is aimed at providing assistance to the producers to supply additional information to consumers on products characteristics and production methods, introducing quality systems as a basis for labelling and protection of the names and expressions describing agricultural products and foodstuffs of added value. This Regulation further stipulates quality systems for geographical labelling, i.e. protected designations of origin and protected geographical indications, the system of traditional specialities guaranteed, and the second degree of a quality system, i.e. non-obligatory quality expressions ensuring added value on the internal market.

2.1. Protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, and traditional specialities guaranteed

Protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, and traditional specialities guaranteed are informing mechanisms guaranteeing to the consumer a purchase of a traditional product of recognised and verifiable quality and of known local origin. In practice, each of the mentioned labels refers to a protected name of a certain product produced in accordance with the Product specification, whose production was controlled by a control body. Only product for which their producers possess a valid Certification of Conformity with the Product specification, issued by the control body, may place onto the market a product under a protected name and labelled with the stipulated protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, or label of traditional specialities guaranteed. It is that label that is a guarantee for the purchase of an authentic product.

In the Republic of Croatia, the process of name protection of agricultural products and foodstuffs as protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, or traditional specialities guaranteed is carried out in accordance with the EU and national legislation in force, with the control body for the process performance being the Ministry of Agriculture. The process is carried out in two stages: the first protecting the name of the product at national level, ending in issuing of a Decision on transitional national protection as protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, or traditional specialities guaranteed. The second stage of the process is registering the label at the EU level, and is carried out by the European Commission.

In accordance with the stipulated procedure, the process of name protection can be initiated only by a group of producers or and individual producer if they succeed to prove that they are the only producer of such product on a given

geographical area, and that characteristic of such product differ from the ones of similar products from neighbouring areas. The key document in the name protection process is the Product specification, which has to entail – among others – all characteristics of the given product as well as production stages and methods, and a description of the causal connection between specific product characteristics and the geographical area of its production. Based on the Product specification, the competent authority, i.e. the Ministry of Agriculture, issues a decision on name protection by the so-called transitional national protection.

After the decision on a transitional national protection of the name has been issued as protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, or traditional specialities guaranteed, it is the duty of the applicant to submit to the Ministry of Agriculture the documentation need for the registration of the name, i.e. the label, at the EU level within two months. The key document in the registration process, based on which the European Commission issues a Decision on the name registration, is a Single document, representing a summary of the Product specification. The process ends in issuing of the Implementing regulation on the entry of the name into the register of protected designations of origin and protected geographical indications, i.e. the Implementing regulation on the entry of the name into the register of traditional specialities guaranteed.

During both processes, at both the national and the EU level, the notice of a submitted application for the name protection is published in official gazettes in order to provide for a time period during which any stakeholder with a legitimate interest can oppose the submitted application. If such opposition should be submitted, it should be attempted to reach an agreement between the opposing parties; if that proves impossible, the competent authority initiates a procedure to issue the final decision on the name protection.

After adopting the Decision on the transitional national protection, the product name is protected on the territory of the republic of Croatia from any misuse, imitation, consumer misleading, and direct or indirect commercial use of products for which their producers don't possess valid certifications of conformity with the Product specification. The same protection is in force in all EU member states after the product name, i.e. label, has been registered at the EU level.

After issuing a Decision on the transitional national protection of the product name, the protected name may be used only by producers who possess a valid Certification of conformity with the Product specification. The process of verifying the product conformity with the Product specification in the Republic of Croatia is carried out by the competent control bodies, based on a Control scheme approved by the Ministry of Agriculture. Upon the completed control, the control body issues the producer with a product Certification of conformity with the Product specification.

All producers who possess a valid Certification of conformity with the Product specification – after registration of the product as one of the labels at the EU level – must label those products with an EU label of protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, or traditional specialities guaranteed, placing it directly next to the name of the product. Voluntarily, producers may also place on their products the national protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, or a label of traditional specialities guaranteed.

Table 1. A list of protected Croatian products

ZOI	ZOZP
Extra virgin olive oil from Cres	Prosciutto from Krk
Tangerines from Neretva valley	Kulen from Baranja
Sauerkraut from Ogulin	Potatoes from Lika
Prosciutto from Istria	Prosciutto from Drniš
Olive oil from Krk	Dalmatian prosciutto
Olive oil from Korčula	Chard pie from Poljice
Lamb meet from Pag	Turkey from Zagorje region
Olive oil from Šolta	Slavonian kulen
Cabbage from Varaždin	Meat pie from Međimurje region
Slavonian honey	Lamb meet from Lika

Source: Authors based on data of Ministry of Agriculture.

3. METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory allows access to social processes through participant observation as well by engaging in the daily life rituals of the society, the researcher is studying (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Grounded theory requires the researcher to act as an instrument in data collection and to be committed to representing the life experiences of informants on the descriptive and explanatory levels (Sherry, 1991). It also permits research design to emerge throughout the process of data collection – in this case, it was conducted in Istria, Kvarner, Dalmatia and Zagreb City in 2017 and 2018.

3.1 In-depth interviews

The second author conducted a depth interview about process of production products with PDO/PGI label. In interviews, a semi-structured interview format was used to allow themes to emerge (McCracken, 1998). We interviewed producers to learn about their insights into production, distribution and sales process. The research generated about 62 single-spaced pages of observations and interview transcripts. The interview participants included 23 producers. Most people accepted being interviewed. The researchers promised confidentiality to all of them. The response rate was 75%, based on 23 informants cooperating out of 31 available producers. Other producers declined participation because they were in a hurry.

The analytical operations included categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration and refutation. This procedure provides a means for managing qualitative data for the purpose of analysis and interpretation (Spiggle, 1994).

4. RESULTS

Case study 1 – PDO olive oil

Based on the analysis of the interviews conducted with olive oil producers with the designation of origin (n=17), it can be concluded that the producers are members of associations that initiated the labelling of olive oil at EU level. At the island of Krk, the association of olive oil producers of the island Krk Drobica is active, on the island of Cres, the association of olive oil producers Ulika is active, on the island of Šolta, the association Zlatna Šoltanka is active, and on the island of Korčula, the association of olive oil producers Vela Luka is active. Due to the enthusiasm and persistence of the members of the association, the olive oil from the island of Cres was protected at the EU level in 2015, and the olive oil from the islands of Krk, Šolta, and Korčula in 2016.

According to the results of the interviews with producers, a small number of producers of olive oil with the designation of origin can be explained with an insufficient education of Croatian producers on designations of origin and geographical indications. Product labelling system in Croatia is still not recognised by the consumers. The main disadvantage of labelling olive oil with the designation of origin are the costs covered by the producer, and strict adherence to the Product specifications under the control of authorised control bodies. Still, the producers agree that it takes time for positive effects of the protection of olive oil with designations of origin to show.

The supply chain of olive oil with the designation of origin in Croatia is very simple, thus it can be called a short supply chain. The first stakeholder in the supply chain is the producer of olives used in the production of olive oil with a designation of origin. Mostly, indigenous sorts of olives are used, like Oblica, Levantinka, or Debela. The producers of olive oil with a designation of origin possess a small number of olive trees, often located on fragmented and disconnected surfaces, which leads to the conclusion that their produced quantity is not competitive on the domestic, let alone the foreign marketplace. Production of olives for the purposes of production of olive oil with a designation of origin in 2016 stood for only 0.3% of the total olive production in Croatia, state the producers. From the above reasons, the producers have oriented themselves to the added value, which is top quality and designation of origin.

The next stakeholder in the supply chain of olive oil with a designation of origin is the oil factory. Only four oil factories participate in the processing of olives for the purposes of production of olive oil with a designation of origin, and the processing price per a kilogram of olives in 2016 averaged at €0.20. It is important to emphasise that all oil factories which participated in the processing of olives for the purposes of production of olive oil with a designation of origin are privately owned. Furthermore, olive producers have neither long-term nor short-term agreements with the oil factories, but assess their relationship as a positive one.

The last stakeholder in the supply chain is the producer of olive oil, who is at the same time the distributor. The main sales channel of olive oil with a designation of origin is direct sales, especially through tourism (sale at the farm or in their own shop). Based on the results of the interviews conducted with the producers of olive oil with a designation of origin, it was established that the price of labelled olive oil is almost twice the price of olive oil without the designation of origin. Despite the higher price, the largest share of the interviewed producers state that olive growing is their additional source of income, and for the majority of them the main source of income is outside the production and sale of olive oil. It is important to emphasise that olive oil with a designation of origin is not exported while an average of 5% of the total production of olive oil without the designation of origin is exported, mainly into European countries.

As far as marketing activities are concerned, the members of the associations carry out communication activities, such as festivals dedicated to the olive oil (e.g. Drobznica fest, Dani korčulanskog maslinovog ulja), they use publicity, they are active on social networks, and some of them maintain their own web sites with informative content. Still, the producers are of the opinion that the Ministry of Agriculture should invest more effort into consumer education on geographical indications as well as their promotion.

Case study 2 – PGI Dalmatian prosciutto

In Croatia, there are 4 prosciuttos labelled with protected geographical indications – the prosciutto from Krk, the Dalmatian prosciutto, and the prosciutto from Drniš, bearing the protected geographical indication, and the prosciutto from Istria, bearing the protected designation of origin. In this paper, we focused only on the Dalmatian prosciutto because the largest number of producers of labelled prosciutto is made of the producers of Dalmatian prosciutto. The Dalmatian prosciutto has had the protected geographical indication since 2016. In the production of the Dalmatian prosciutto with the protected geographical indications, a total of 7 producers participated in 2016. Just like with the producers of labelled olive oil, the producers of the Dalmatian prosciutto with a protected geographical indication are members of the association Dalmatinski pršut (Dalmatian prosciutto), which initiated the protection process of the Dalmatian prosciutto.

According to the results of the interviews with the producers of labelled olive oil, the producers of the Dalmatian prosciutto are of the opinion that consumers in Croatia have insufficient knowledge on geographical indications, and that foreign tourists largely recognise and value foodstuffs bearing geographical indications. Still, the main reason for the initiative for protection process of the Dalmatian prosciutto is the elimination of falsely labelled Dalmatian prosciutto from the national market. The controls of the authorised control body (in this case, the company Biotehnikon poduzetnički centar d.o.o.) ensure the adherence to the technical specification. Although some of the producers of the Dalmatian prosciutto are not satisfied with the current success on the market, most of them are of the opinion that longer time periods are required for positive effects of labelling.

The supply chain of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the protected geographical indication in Croatia is more complex, i.e. it involves more stakeholders than in the case of the supply chain of olive oil bearing the designation of origin. The first stakeholder in the supply chain is the producer of swine fodder. Considering that the largest share of the primary raw material for the production of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the geographical indication (hams) is imported, the producers of the swine fodder are mainly companies of foreign origin.

The next stakeholder in the supply chain is the pig farmer, followed by the slaughterhouse. Both those stakeholders in the supply chain are located outside of Croatia. The producers of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the protected geographical indication most often import hams from Hungary and Austria, but they have neither long-term nor short-term agreements with slaughterhouses, i.e. pig farmers. The main reasons for the fact that fresh hams used for the production of the labelled Dalmatian prosciutto are imported are the lower price of imported hams and a shortage of domestically grown pork meat (more specifically, hams). The producers of the labelled Dalmatian prosciutto forge cooperation with pig farmers on their own, visiting often the pig farms in order to be persuaded of the quality of fresh meat used later on in the production of the Dalmatian prosciutto.

After the slaughterhouse, the next stakeholder in the supply chain is a transport company. According to the results of the interviews conducted with the producers of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the protected geographical indication, the transportation is more and more frequently organised by foreign transport companies, but they sometimes hire also companies from Croatia that offer transportation services under adequate technical conditions.

The next stakeholder in the supply chain is the producer of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the protected geographical indication. The production of the labelled Dalmatian prosciutto in 2016 made up approximately 17% of the total production of prosciutto in Croatia, so state the producers. The largest producers of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the protected geographical indication are the companies Pivac and Voštane.

The last stakeholder in the supply chain of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the protected geographical indication is the distributor. The main sales channels for the labelled Dalmatian prosciutto are supermarkets (ca. 50% of the sales), HoReCa (hotels and restaurants), specialised stores, and other sales channels, such as own shops. The price of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the protected geographical indication is higher than of the unlabelled prosciuttos on the domestic market. Half of all the producers export the labelled Dalmatian prosciutto, mostly into the European countries, such as Slovenia and Germany while half of the producers sell only on the domestic market.

The results of the interviews conducted with the producers of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the protected geographical indication showed that the members of the association Dalmatinski pršut conduct promotional activities, holding a festival Dani dalmatinskog pršuta each year, selecting each year a different city in Croatia with the aim of spreading the word of the labelled Dalmatian prosciutto. Besides, they participate on trade fairs displaying agricultural products and foodstuffs, use publicity, and are active on social networks.

5. DISCUSSION

Protected designation of origin and protected geographical indications guarantee to the consumer an authentic traditional product of recognised quality and of local origin, produced in accordance with stipulated rules and under continuous production control.

A small number of producers can be explained by an insufficient education of Croatian consumers on designations of origin and geographical indications. The product labelling system in Croatia is still not recognised by consumers. The main disadvantage of labelling olive oil with a designation of origin are the costs covered by the producer, as well as a strict adherence to the product specifications under the control of the authorised control bodies. Still, producers agree that positive effects take time.

The supply chain of olive oil with the designation of origin in Croatia is a short supply chain. The first stakeholder in the supply chain is the olive producer, the next one is the oil factory, and the last stakeholder is olive oil producer, who is a distributor at the same time. The main sales channel of olive oil with the designation of origin is direct sales, especially through tourism (sale on the farm or in own shop). The price of the labelled olive oil is almost twice as high as the price of olive oil without the designation of origin. As far as the marketing activities are concerned, the members of the association conduct communication activities, so that they organise festivals dedicated to olive oil (e.g. Drobica fest, Dani korčulanskog maslinovog ulja), they use publicity, they are active on social networks while some of them maintain their own web sites with informative content.

According to the results of the interviews conducted with the producers of the labelled Dalmatian prosciutto, the producers of the Dalmatian prosciutto consider that Croatian consumers don't have sufficient knowledge on geographical indications and that foreign tourists largely recognise and value foodstuffs bearing geographical indications.

Most of the producers are of the opinion that positive effects of labelling take time. The supply chain of the Dalmatian prosciutto bearing the geographical indication in Croatia is more complex, i.e. it involves more stakeholders when compared to the supply chain of olive oil bearing the designation of origin.

The members of the association Dalmatinski pršut conduct promotional activities, so that each year they hold a festival Dani dalmatinskog pršuta, selecting each year a different city in Croatia with the aim of spreading a word on the labelled Dalmatian prosciutto. Besides, they participate on trade fairs displaying agricultural products and foodstuffs, they use publicity, and are active on social networks.

The use of Protected Denomination of Origin/Protected Geographical Indication (PDO/PGI) labels could help local producers and small-sized firms to survive and expand their business, thus reduce their dependence on subsidies. Furthermore, labels by food companies has become a marketing strategy very similar to branding. Such labels provide consumers with information on the area of production and thus imply originality and authenticity.

The early adopters of PDOs and PGIs can be likened to innovators in the diffusion of innovations. However, they have complained about the bureaucracy of the application procedures and the costs of inspection and verification. As it was stated by Ilbery and Kneafsey (2000) these difficulties could act as significant 'barriers' to further adoption. Indeed, PDO and PGI status is currently not being used as a marketing tool. Although the EU is promising an advertising campaign to educate the public about regional speciality food and drink product (SFDPs) with PDO/PGI status, it could take a very long time before a majority of producers of regional SFDPs will apply for such a quality mark (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 2000).

6. CONCLUSION

Our findings are consistent with other studies that believe that both the EU Commission and producers might well have overestimated the potential benefits indicated by PDO and PGI trademarks for consumers. There is an impelling need to implement measures to streamline the communication of information regarding the quality of food products and increase the effectiveness of European trademarks as a means of assurance. Operating in this way will not only support the revitalization of typical food products and ensure their competitiveness in the national and international scenario, but also limit the well-known phenomenon of product imitation that damages not only consumers but the entire European food system. Moreover, given that information about food quality can be effective only when it can be processed and used by its target audience, it would appear necessary to build different targeted marketing strategies to capture the best business opportunities for Croatian typical food manufacturers. Producers may have not realised that a certification such as PDO/PGI must be part of coherent marketing strategy and that a appropriate marketing mix is required. An interesting development of the current work could be to investigate consumer knowledge and use of geographical indication labels.

7. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The limited direct effect of region of origin for Croatian consumers, both for Olive Oil and Prosciutto, may well be due not only lack of knowledge about production methods and the significance of the PDO/PGI certification, but also to the influence of public campaigns launched on TV by industrial producers of same product.

This publicity stresses the idea of a close association between these industrially produced oils/prosciutto and countryside environment, and the consumer is usually unaware of the non-traditional refining and blending process they have undergone. Consequently, the urban consumer may see no difference between these well-advertised conventional products and PDO/PGI products, which are hardly advertised at TV. Moreover, the urban consumer may be convinced that a nationally advertised product is superior to that of a local, little – known producing area and finally, the urban consumer may not be familiar with the taste of conventional produced by the PDO/PGI certified or the traditional –type regional methods, and may be unwilling to experiment.

This type of reaction presents a potential threat to the category of PDO/PGI products as a whole. To ensure the survival of such products, it is essential that more information be made available about the meaning of PDO and PGI certification and the guarantees it offers, so that the consumer can make an informed choice between these and other high-quality food products.

Although our study sample is consistent with others reported in the literature, we acknowledge the limitation of the sample size and representativeness. However, this research was intended to be exploratory. Future studies should expand the sample size, to enhance validity. In our suit of more robust results, further research could extend this study to one that combines qualitative and quantitative methods (field or laboratory experiment with consumers). It may be worthwhile extending this exploratory research by examining the consumer perceptions of protected labels with different products. Finally, futures studies should compare and contrast comments by consumers and producers within different PDO or PGI protected products.

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PROIZVODI SA ZAŠTIĆENOM OZNAKOM IZVORNOSTI I ZEMLJOPISNOG PODRIJETLA NA HRVATSKOM TRŽIŠTU

SAŽETAK

Ovo istraživanje predstavlja prvi korak prema opisu profila i motiva hrvatskih proizvođača i njihovih načina proizvodnje hrane sa zaštićenim oznakama izvornosti i zemljopisnog podrijetla (ZOI i ZOZP). Rad je usmjeren na ispitivanje percepcije proizvođača o uspješnosti proizvodnje zaštićenih proizvoda, kao i marketinških aktivnosti kojima se povećava uspjeh takvih proizvoda. Primarna metoda istraživanja je metoda dubinska intervju sa 17 proizvođača maslinovog ulja (ZOI) i 6 proizvođača dalmatinskog pršuta (ZOZP). Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da proizvođači zaštićenih proizvoda smatraju da je najveći problem nedovoljna edukacija hrvatskih proizvođača o oznakama ZOI/ ZOZP te visoki troškovi potrebni za zaštitu i kontrolu proizvoda. Birokracija i troškovi provedbe, zajedno s nedostatkom znanja potrošača, spriječavaju brzo usvajanje ovakvih proizvoda u Hrvatskoj. Međutim, proizvođači obje vrste proizvoda smatraju da veći uspjeh zahtijeva veća ulaganja u marketinške aktivnosti tijekom duljeg vremenskog razdoblja. Rad završava zaključkom te implikacijama za menadžere i istraživače.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: zaštićena oznaka izvornosti, zaštićena oznaka zemljopisnog podrijetla, prehrambeni proizvodi, proizvođači, Hrvatska.