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THE PATH OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA INTO THE GLOBAL RASPBERRY MARKETING CHANNEL

Put Republike Srbije u globalni kanal marketinga
maline

Abstract

The aim of this study is to propose an efficient structure of raspberry marketing channels in both domestic and international markets, considering the modern agribusiness system of the French company Roger Descours Group, which has a subsidiary, Frucom food doo, in Serbia. Concurrently, it highlights the changes that have occurred in the marketing channel structure, significant for future traffic operations and new opportunities arising from market conditions. Through an analysis of the specifics of raspberry production and marketing channels and utilizing multiple linear regression of raspberry production and exports from the Republic of Serbia, as well as raspberry exports from Frucom Food doo, the possible means of creating a competitive advantage in the global market will be demonstrated. The primary objective of this study is to identify key directions for the future development of international raspberry placement from the Republic of Serbia, assess potential constraints in this domain, and propose basic measures and activities to enhance the competitiveness of agricultural and food exports in foreign markets.

Only a capable food industry with secure agribusiness systems as market entities can guarantee production security on farmers' estates. The level of development of raspberry distribution channels can be identified by applying the quantitative method of linear regression to assess the dependent variable (quantity of raspberries exported from the Republic of Serbia) using independent variables (total quantity of raspberries produced in the Republic of Serbia, raspberry exports from the Frucom food doo cold storage).

Keywords: *agribusiness system, raspberry, export, strategy, sales channels, competitiveness*

Sažetak

Cilj rada je predlog efikasne strukture kanala marketinga maline na domaćem i međunarodnom tržištu posmatrajući moderan agrobiznis sistem francuske kompanije Roger Descours Group koja ima filijalu Frucom food doo u Srbiji. Uporedo sa tim, ukazuje se na promene koje su se dogodile u strukturi kanala marketinga koje su značajne za funkcionisanje prometa u budućnosti i za nove mogućnosti koje se otvaraju primenom tržišnih uslova. Kroz analizu specifičnosti maline njene strukture kanala marketinga, a uz pomoću višestruke linearne regresije proizvodnje i izvoza maline Republike Srbije, kao i izvoza maline iz firme Frucom Food doo, pokazaće se mogući način stvaranja konkurentne prednosti na svetskom tržištu.

Osnovni cilj ovog rada je da se utvrde ključni pravci budućeg razvoja međunarodnog plasmana maline iz Republike Srbije, sagledaju moguća ograničenja u tom domenu, kao i da se predlože osnovne mere i aktivnosti za poboljšanje konkurentnosti izvoza naših poljoprivredno-prehrambenih proizvoda na stranim tržištima.

Samo sposobna prehrambena industrija sa sigurnim agrobiznis sistemima kao tržišnim subjektima može da garantuje sigurnost proizvodnje na imanjima zemljoradnika. Stepen razvijenosti kanala distribucije maline može se identifikovati primenom kvantitativne metode linearne regresije za procenu zavisne varijable (količina maline izvežene iz Republike Srbije) korišćenjem nezavisnih varijabli (ukupno proizvedena količina maline u Republici Srbiji, izvoz maline hladnjače Frucom food doo).

Ključne reči: *agrobiznis sistem, malina, izvoz, strategija, kanali prodaje, konkurentnost*

Introduction

Alternative marketing channels for agricultural products are expanding, but there is no unified stance on how marketing channel entities should position agricultural products to maximize profit. [5] One factor that has contributed to the growth of the fresh berry market is the recognition of berries as antioxidants, which preserve human health and protect against diseases. [1] Raspberry is the most renowned antioxidant, and the Republic of Serbia possesses comparative advantages in raspberry production due to its geographical location. The profitability and competitiveness of raspberry production depend on various economic and climatic factors, as well as individual decisions made by producers. [3]

It is a fact that the conditions for primary product production vary across different countries, considering that the geographical distribution of resources is irregular and climatic conditions depend on the specific geographical location of each country. Due to these differences in production conditions, the relative costs of primary product production vary among different countries. Additionally, countries differ in their demand for primary products: industrialized countries generally have a greater need for primary products than developing countries due to the use of these products as inputs in their industries.

Previous research represents specific case studies of individual African countries where agriculture plays a significant role in the overall economy and is conducted for the needs of policy makers in those countries. Such results suggest that in the case of small and medium enterprises, foreign ownership may contribute to the initial initiation of export activities, but their extent depends more on other characteristics of the enterprises, such as productivity and technology. Chen, Sheng, and Findlay assessed the impact of foreign ownership on export decisions and export volume using the largest sample to date of over 134,130 firms in China's manufacturing sector. They found that the share of foreign capital positively affects both the initiation of exports and the intensity and overall value of firms' exports. [2] Based on the Shmic and Helmberger model, it can be concluded that foreign direct investment and trade can be substitutes

or complements, depending on the initial assumptions. Kodzima emphasizes that only foreign direct investment in sectors where the country of origin of the investment has a comparative disadvantage leads to a complementary relationship between foreign direct investment and trade. [6, p. 7] Empirical research on the impact of foreign direct investment in the agricultural sector thus far does not provide general conclusions. [17, p. 2]

Foreign direct investment can directly impact the export growth of the host country, especially if the subsidiaries of multinational companies export their entire production or part of it abroad. This impact is described by the theoretical model of vertically integrated multinational companies by Helpman, where companies fragment their production process and locate its different stages depending on the relative costs of production factors in different locations. [4, p. 103]

Export strategies are the most common form of entry into international markets because they require minimal resources, have a lower level of risk, and are strategically highly flexible. [16] The study primarily addresses organizational issues in the domain of modern agribusiness, aiming to emphasize the need for transforming the role that contemporary trade plays in connecting various participants in the modern food supply chain. In contrast to family farming, the model of agro-industrial business focuses on specialization in production and the market. Management is based on professional management. Through vertical integration with the French company Roger Descours Group and horizontal integration with the Serbian firm Yugent doo, a new agribusiness system, Frucom food doo, is formed. The research provides empirical evidence for understanding the dimensions of raspberry sales channel analysis, particularly in creating competitive advantages. Factors contributing to horizontal and vertical movement and linking of companies and cooperatives have been identified, thereby motivating the development of the local industry.

Although progress in the agri-sector has been comprehensive and visible in most countries, its degree and speed vary drastically. Therefore, it can be said that agriculture, like other sectors, reflects the overall state and level of economic and societal development. In developed

countries, the concept of modern agribusiness functions, with the agribusiness complex as its backbone.

Literature overview

Like any other area of economic interest, especially when examining elements of an economic system, the essence of agriculture can be approached from both micro and macro perspectives. At the micro level, the task of economics is to explore the fundamental laws of behavior of individual producers and consumers and the repercussions of their actions on the market system (price formation system). On the other hand, the macroeconomic issues of the agricultural sector encompass the integration of all individual producers and consumers into the agro-food system of the national economy, and more broadly, involve the participation of the domestic agricultural sector in international trade, as well as its position and influence in the international and global markets. [10]

When considering the drivers of modern international trade flows, it can be noted that in the field of agriculture (as well as in all other areas of foreign trade), the economically strongest actors are transnational companies, while small and medium-sized enterprises find their place in fulfilling certain smaller segments of demand known as “market niches.”

Considering that there are many participants in the agri-food product chain (agricultural input producers, primary producers, processors, distributors, wholesale and retail traders), the situation is even more pronounced, in the sense that in some segments of this chain, the top ten companies, in terms of revenue, dominate almost the entire market. Additionally, it should be noted that the most developed countries in the world, such as the USA, Germany, France, the UK, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, lead in scientific research in the development of genetic material of plant and animal species, their cultivation for commercial purposes, as well as in the development of biotechnology related to the production of fertilizers, animal feed, and medicines. A strategy, which would create a competitive position for Serbia, should include changes in the field of production and technological innovation, branding promotion policies

that would facilitate the performance in both domestic and foreign markets, improving the quality of business operations, and business and market orientation of all the stakeholders in the food supply chain. [13, p. 181]

In recent years, we have noticed that large companies strive to not only promote bioeconomy and enhance the diversity and productivity of plant and animal life but also emphasize the importance of using biomass for commercial purposes. Their aim is not only to master the natural resources capable of sustainable production and food security in the future but also to control natural processes on Earth. Specifically, these companies seek to quantify and commodify the reproductive capacities of the planet through market mechanisms, with the assistance of other interest groups such as government entities, investors, and certain non-governmental organizations, by deploying capital and forming partnerships with domestic or foreign companies. [8]

The consumption of berries has gained significance due to the utilization of niche consumer markets with medium and high incomes who are willing to pay for products in line with their lifestyle. [9] [15] The neglect of agribusiness marketing concepts has led to supply shortages. As a result, prices have risen, and quality has declined. Only integrated marketing concepts can increase quality, yields, profitability, and competitiveness. [11, p. 104] [7]

Methodology of research

The research was conducted using standard methods in the field of economics, which include the utilization of statistical instruments. The entire study is based on the application of a range of contemporary quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. In analyzing the obtained data, descriptive and comparative methods were applied on one hand, and testing and observation methods on the other hand. The research is based on available information from secondary sources, as well as specifically collected data from the French company Roger Descours Group, which has a subsidiary, Frucom food doo, in Serbia.

Certain phenomena in the research were commented on based on secondary sources, namely, by reviewing and systematizing previous research covering the relevant area.

By processing data on raspberry production and exports in SPSS, the trend of raspberry exports for the period 2014. – 2022. is analyzed. The impact of raspberry production in Serbia and raspberry exports from the Frucom food doo company (independent variables) on raspberry exports from Serbia (dependent variable) is examined using a multiple linear regression model.

The obtained results provide an overview of the model. The R values represent the correlation coefficient. R can be considered as a measure of the quality of predicting the dependent variable; in this case, exports. Unstandardized coefficients indicate how the dependent variable varies depending on the chosen independent variable when all other independent variables are held constant. The study also utilized a statistical comparison method of raspberry exports between Serbia and the French company Roger Descours Group, whose subsidiary is Frucom food doo, through a multiple linear regression model.

International comparisons are extremely important as they show not only differences in the level of development and productivity but also the competitive ability of Serbia's agribusiness. The latest literature from renowned international journals was also used.

Results and discussion

Frucom Food is a subsidiary of the Roger Descours Group in Serbia, so the company faces no difficulties in placing goods on international markets, as evidenced by the fact that Frucom Food exports 99% of its goods. An advantage

for the Frucom Food subsidiary is that the Roger Descours Group operates in countries that produce raspberries. Since the acquisition of Yugent Food doo and Frucom Food doo, Roger Descours Group has shortened the marketing channel for both firms, as business is conducted without intermediaries, and the margin that Yugent Food doo and Frucom Food doo once earned is now the margin of Roger Descours Group. With this acquisition, both companies are more competitive in the market because they have reduced costs. Frucom Food's predecessor companies, Yugent and Frucom, were suppliers to the Roger Descours Group, and their cooperation was conducted through the broker firm Viva fruit. Due to the security of placement and procurement, all three companies decided to merge. The raspberry processing process in the cold storage facility begins with reception. The raspberries are frozen, causing the fruits to stick together. Stuck fruits are only suitable for the final product of lower quality and price. To preserve quality, Frucom Food has multiple purchasing points, specifically 52 along the Arilje-Perućac stretch.

Increasing the number of purchasing points reduces the number of cooperatives per purchasing point, as well as the quantity of purchased raspberries per purchasing point, resulting in faster loading, transportation, better quality control of raspberries, and shorter reception times at the purchasing point. Problems that arise with producers include constant dissatisfaction with the purchase price, slow acceptance of hygiene conditions, harvesting methods, and pesticide application. During raspberry procurement, Frucom Food grades the raspberries for cooperatives.

Table 1. Raspberry exports by country from Frucom Food doo for the period 2014-2023, in %

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Belgium		0.871			3.345	0.575		0.805	10.407	5.094
Bulgaria		1.015						0		
France	94.832	91.934	4.56	79.325	76.587	72.769	65.246	69.901	77.526	78.168
Netherlands			0.00	0.965						
Croatia				0.019						
Italy		1.017								
Japan				0.481	0.434		0.303			
Canada	5.168		0.00	14.051	10.585	23.253	27.947	28.491	9.344	15.247
Germany		3.133					0.558		1.892	
Poland				1.925	4.672					
USA			0.00	3.234	4.376	3.403	5.946		0.831	1.491
Turkey		2.030						0.803		

Source: Author's processing based on [14]

In this way, it encourages producers to intensify the application of agronomic measures to produce quality fruit. As a positive effect, besides quality raspberries, we also achieve increased yields from 7t/h to 13t/h. [12, p. 492]. Table 1 indicates the markets for Serbian raspberries exported from the company Frucom Food doo, during the period from 2014 to 2023. The French market dominates as the importer, with an average share of 76.3% for the specified research period. We conclude that the vertical integration of Frucom Food doo with the French company Roger Descours Group has secured the majority of Serbian raspberry placements in the French market.

The surge in raspberry prices in 2008 led to an increase in raspberry production from 280,000 tons in 2008 to 490,000 tons in 2018. Weather conditions in 2013 were not conducive to a full raspberry yield, which would have been approximately 435,000 tons under favorable conditions, excluding small raspberry producers. Global raspberry demand amounted to 350,000 tons. At that time, it could already be inferred that there was a possibility of an 85,000-ton surplus in raspberry production. Due to the potential trend, Serbia should have implemented quotas for additional raspberry plantations. Quotas were not introduced, and in 2018, we witnessed overproduction where raspberry stocks were carried over from 2015 to subsequent years. Producers and processors found themselves in an unfavorable situation due to overproduction in the global raspberry market. Raspberry prices are determined from June of the current harvest to the next harvest (not based on the calendar year). The product is frozen and

processed from harvest to harvest. Most contracts are annual and are signed towards the end of the harvest. Deliveries occur from harvest to harvest, and prices remain unchanged throughout the year. Very little uncontracted goods remain for sale, about 10% in a normal raspberry production year. When overproduction occurs, unsold raspberries can be much higher, leading to price declines if contracted later. There can also be a catastrophic drop in raspberry prices if there is overproduction in other countries, as was the case from 2015 to 2018. For example, the price of Rolenda raspberry dropped from 2.60 EUR/kg to 1.40 EUR/kg in January 2018 (harvest of 2017). Processors who had uncontracted goods at 2.60 EUR/kg faced significant losses.

In 2020, the purchase price of raspberries increased by approximately 37% compared to the previous year (Figure 1). The reason for the rise in raspberry prices lies in reduced global raspberry stocks. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increased demand for raspberries worldwide, as well as other berries. They were consumed for their medicinal properties as antioxidants and as a preventive measure.

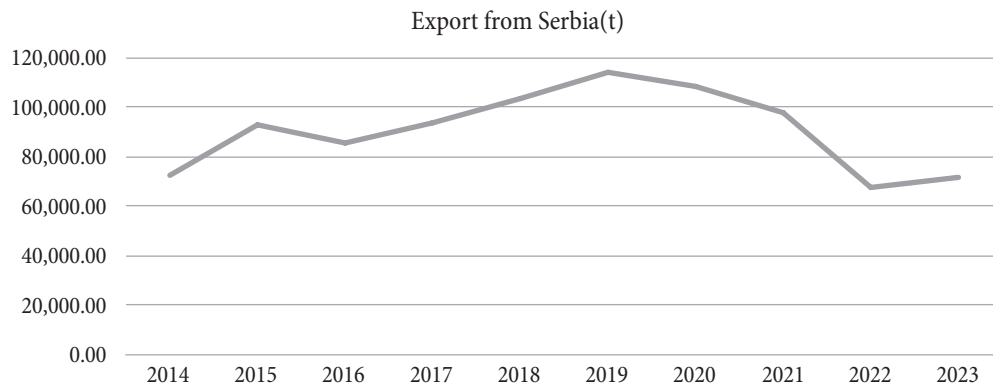
In recent years, areas where raspberries are predominantly grown have experienced early frosts, heavy rains accompanied by hailstorms, and in 2020, floods that struck western Serbia, causing significant damage and losses. These weather conditions have led to a decline in the exported quantity of raspberries (Figure 2) in the period from 2019 to 2022. Besides weather conditions, the reduced raspberry supply is also influenced by farmers abandoning raspberry

Figure 1. Raspberry Exports from the Republic of Serbia from 2014 to 2023 in 000 EUR



Source: Author's processing based on [14]

Figure 2. Raspberry exports from the Republic of Serbia in the period 2014-2023 in tons



Source: Author's processing based on [14]

production due to its unprofitability, low raspberry prices in recent years, and a shortage of seasonal workers.

By processing data on raspberry exports and production in SPSS, the trend in raspberry exports for the period 2014-2022 is analyzed. The impact of raspberry production in the Republic of Serbia and raspberry exports from Frucom food doo (independent variables) on raspberry exports from the Republic of Serbia (dependent variable) is examined.

The first table of interest is the model overview table. This table provides values for the coefficients R, R², adjusted R², and the standard error of estimate, which can be used to determine how well the regression model fits the data: The “R” column represents the value of R, the correlation coefficient. R can be considered as a measure of the prediction quality of the dependent variable; in this case, raspberry exports. The value of 0.892 in this example indicates an absolute level of prediction accuracy. The “R²” column represents the value of R² (also known as the coefficient of determination), which is the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can

be explained by the independent variables (technically, this is the share of variance that the regression model calculates above and beyond the mean model). From our value of 0.796, it can be seen that the independent variables explain 79.6% of the variability in our dependent variable, raspberry exports.

By analyzing the relationship (Coefficients Table) between raspberry exports from the Republic of Serbia (dependent variable) with raspberry exports from Frucom Food company (predictor) and raspberry production in the Republic of Serbia (predictor), we obtain the equation of the model:

$$\hat{y} = 76362.550 + 23.434x_1 - 0.366x_2$$

We can conclude that the independent variable of raspberry exports from Frucom Food company is statistically significant (p=0.006), while the quantity of raspberry production in Serbia (p=0.113) is not a statistically significant variable for raspberry exports from the Republic of Serbia for the observed period.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	Change Statistics		
							df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.892 ^a	.796	.728	8171.52895	.796	11.694	2	6	.009

a. Predictors: (Constant), raspberry_production_in_Serbia, raspberry_export_from_Frucom_food_doo

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	76362.550	13389.779		5.703	.001
	raspberry_export_from_Frucom_food_doo	23.434	5.561	1.261	4.214	.006
	raspberry_production_in_Serbia	-.366	.197	-.556	-1.857	.113

a. Dependent Variable: raspberry_production_in_Serbia

The unstandardized coefficients show how the dependent variable varies depending on the independent variable, when all other independent variables are held constant. Let's consider the effect of raspberry exports from Frucom Food company. The unstandardized coefficient for raspberry exports from Frucom Food company is 23.434 (see coefficients table). If raspberry production in Serbia is constant, an increase in raspberry exports from Frucom Food company by 1 ton results in an average increase in raspberry exports from the Republic of Serbia by 23.434 tons for the observed period. The result of increasing production by 1 ton leads to a decrease in raspberry exports from the Republic of Serbia by an average of 0.366 tons, due to raspberry production surplus in the observed period, when raspberry exports from Frucom Food company are constant.

One possible way for Serbian raspberries, which possess the best quality globally and serve as a strategic product of the Republic of Serbia, to remain competitive is through vertical integration with a foreign company. Ensuring a secure and consistent presence in the international market, regardless of fluctuations in raspberry production quantity, can establish a strong and stable agribusiness system. The onset of raspberry hyperproduction of 85,000 tons in 2013, the global raspberry production surplus from 2015 to 2018, led to uncertain raspberry exports from the Republic of Serbia. The Roger Descours Group monitors raspberry market trends globally, determines the required quantities of raspberries to be purchased and stored in the Frucom Food company's cold storage facilities, resulting in profitable agribusiness system operations and a positive unstandardized coefficient of exports. The absence of strategic decisions regarding the necessary raspberry production and export quantities from the Republic of Serbia has led to hyperproduction and uncertain exports.

Conclusion

The revitalization of the agri-food system, stabilization of conditions within it, and the encouragement of competitiveness of domestic enterprises are of paramount importance for the Republic of Serbia, especially considering

its "natural" production capacities, adaptation to long-term market trends (food needs, automatic and global price movements), as well as the significance that the primary sector (especially agriculture) could have for overall economic development.

Modern agriculture is characterized by a range of vertically and horizontally connected sectors and subsectors, constituting an integrated system within the national economy. In addition to primary agricultural production, it encompasses processing, distribution of agricultural products and inputs, segments of industry for the production of equipment and inputs for primary agricultural production (input phase), and machinery and equipment necessary for servicing the food industry, as well as accompanying service activities of each part of this system. Agricultural producers can no longer be viewed in isolation. They are increasingly influenced by socio-economic processes (changes) and are more directed towards non-agricultural activities (primarily industry), both in pre-farm activities (input phase) and post-farm activities (output phase). In developed economies, the main drivers of agribusiness are agro-industrial businesses and family farms, although none of these business models can be viewed in isolation, nor do they exist in their pure forms. Labor remains an important factor in the production process, but modern agriculture is increasingly based on technologically and capital-intensive production factors.

Frucom Food company plans to improve business conditions through better cooperation with cooperatives. To increase their yields, the company will provide better technical support to cooperatives, all with the aim of improving the quality of raw materials and purchasing larger quantities. Maintaining existing standards and focusing on the safety of product quality are the goals of Frucom Food company in the upcoming period.

Horizontal and vertical cooperation and integration in the food supply chain play a crucial role in the efficiency of marketing channels in both domestic and international markets. Vertical integration of the marketing channel backward, with the Roger Descours Group and the Frucom Food company's cold storage facility, places the Frucom Food company among the most successful in Serbia, with a constant goal of being a reliable exporter of frozen

raspberries, meeting the requirements of customers and cooperatives, and supporting them in joint efforts to achieve success. Given that sales are created through inventory systems, the push strategy for raspberry products represents a relevant strategy. Horizontal integration of Frucom Food company with Yugent Food company represents a way to achieve successful results due to the decline in raspberry prices, as it leads to a reduction in the company's operating costs.

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