

Chapter 35

Demand for Food Diversity in Romania

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ABSTRACT

The present research work applied a food diversity measurement tool (Transformed Berry Index) on the 2011 Household Budget Surveys data. The investigation was performed on household purchased based TBI measure and on actual consumption TBI, in order to highlight the errors that one would make if one fails to take into account the production of goods by the household. There are some important differences in the food diversity of the actual food consumption in comparison to the purchased food quantities, the number of food items being higher in the case of actual consumption. However, food diversity does not seem to be influenced by the residence area (urban vs. rural) in any of the two approaches.

INTRODUCTION

In Romania, the transition period was associated to a massive reduction in the population's real incomes, this leading to the increase in the consumption of products considered inferior from a nutritional point of view, such as potatoes and cereal-based products, together with the decrease in consumption of the products that are more valuable in nutritional terms, such as meat and dairy products. Food substitutions took place not only inside certain groups of products, but also between groups of products (meat with cereals, for instance), out of the households' need to adjust their food expenditures in the situation of real incomes diminution (Petrovici and Ritson, 2000).

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Subsequently, in the period of accession preparation to the European Union, and in the post-accession period, meat and dairy consumption increased, but the still low incomes resulted in a very high share of food expenditures in the household budget, in parallel with the relatively low dietary diversity, low consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables and high consumption of animal fat. An important part of the food consumed by households comes from the own produced food and this is especially true for rural households. The difficult situation from an household economic point of view due to the severe reduction in incomes, led to the increase in the share of consumption from own resources. The transfers of products from the rural to the urban households from the same family continue to represent a cultural pattern, and in the situations of crisis even a survival strategy for extended families.

Due to this reason, the investigation of food diversity in Romania cannot be made by exclusively applying the methodology specific to the developed countries, where most food products are bought, as this would exclude the food consumption from own resources, the contribution of which is quite significant for certain households. The present research work applied food diversity measurement tools for a data set obtained from the Household Budget Surveys for the first quarter of the year 2011, both for the amount of products bought by the households and separately for the amount of products effectively consumed on the households, in order to highlight the differences between the results of the two approaches.

Numerous approaches link dietary diversity to the level of incomes (Jackson, 1984). Thus, in the situation when the level of incomes is low, only a subset of available foodstuffs is bought. This pattern is known as the hierarchic demand system. The higher the level of consumption, the larger the number of products that go to the consumer's basket. Most studies dedicated to the developed countries reveal the positive correlation between diversity (measured by the Herfindahl index or the entropy index) and the level of incomes, measured by the real income per capita. One of these studies (Lee and Brown, 1989), where consumer demand for food diversity is measured by the entropy and Simpson indices for budget share, show that consumer demand for food diversity is related to total food expenditures and household size and composition.

The econometric models by which the dietary diversity in the developed countries was investigated, for instance in Germany (Thiele and Weiss, 2003), reveal that dietary diversity is influenced by the household socio-economic characteristics, by income in the first place, then by the household size and composition, mainly the number of children 7 – 17 years old, the residence area and the size of the locality where the household is located. Dietary diversity decreases with the age of household members (up to 46 years), to moderately increase afterwards, in general the relationship being non-linear. The farmer households feature lower diversity for the purchased products, as certain foodstuffs are produced on their own households.

While in the consumption pattern of developed countries, in nutritional terms, it is not the variety between the groups of products that is mostly important, but rather the variety between the individual products, in the less developed countries the diversity between groups of food products can be more important than the diversity of products as such, which could belong to the same group (Swindale and Bilinsky, 2006). At the same time, in the case of subsistence economies, a positive influence upon food diversity on the rural households is brought by the household's access to the agricultural resources (Taruvinga et al., 2013).

Recent studies in the New Member States of EU, including Romania, dedicated to dietary diversity, measured by the Count Measure and the Transformed Berry Index, indicates that food diversity is income elastic (Cockx et al., 2015; Cupak et al., 2014; Alexandri and Pauna, 2015; Alexandri and Kevorchian, 2015). The gender and occupational status of the household head play an important role, as female-

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