

Slow Food: Boeren-Goudse Oplegkaas

Glocalisatie van Echte Oude Kaas

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English Summary

Aged Artisan Gouda is a product at risk of extinction. Nowadays, the production amounts 1% of total farm cheese production, which again is 1% of the overall cheese production in The Netherlands. The producers of this cheese, Co-operation The Producent, and Slow Food Netherlands are united in a Presidium, an association that is supported by Slow Food volunteers who formulate quality standards, organise promotion materials and develop a network of fellow-producers and buyers. The Aged Artisan Gouda Presidium is the first active Dutch Presidium of Slow Food. It's main goal is to organise the production and marketing of Aged Artisan Gouda cheese in such a way that the current producers remain capable of producing this typical cheese in the future.

Production

Since the 17th century farmers in the Dutch 'Green-Heart' produce artisan "Boeren-Goudse kaas" (farmstead cheese from the Gouda area), which is made of raw milk and aged for a minimum of one year. "Boeren-Goudse Oplegkaas (BGO-cheese)" as Aged Artisan Gouda is called in Dutch. The distinctive taste of the cheese is ascribed to characteristics such as the type of cow, pasture feeding, the raw milk used for the cheese dairy, usage of cotton cheesecloth and wooden cheese vats, the volume of the cheeses (20-25 kg), and in particular the maturing of the cheeses ("opleggen") on wooden shelves. The cheese has to be aged for a minimum of one year; however, its taste is not fully developed until it has passed three to four years of maturing. Aged Artisan Gouda is peerless in taste, with a sweet mild flavour that blooms in the mouth, a well-structured aftertaste with a light acidity and the warm caramel taste that characterizes most Gouda cheeses. Its dense curd remains creamy and full even after it has been stored three or four years on wooden shelves. The specific production process of this cheese dairy is established in a protocol that was submitted to the Ark of Taste of Slow Food International.

Agreements in the channel and competition

In the Presidium agreements have been established between the producers and Co-operation The Producent about financing the deal, besides production methods and quality standards. However, we are talking about a very small initiative with hardly any effect on the market and these agreements will have no noticeable effect on competition. Therefore, it is well defensible that the cartel prohibition is not applicable. However, the consequences for the Presidium remain uncertain as the National Cartel Organisation (NMa) leaves the criteria about noticeable effects open. It is important that the NMa defines the construct of manipulability. This clearness is necessary for the many local and small initiatives that exist in food.

Marketing of BGO

Marketing of a typical food product requires much creativity and knowledge. It is important to realise that the image of a product in the perception of consumers is not determined by authentic properties alone. Also health considerations, preparation of the food for consumption, packaging and information are determinants one should consider. Aged Artisan Gouda is a typical product that distinguishes itself from other cheeses by its age. Furthermore it is likely to have a different consumption moment than the common Dutch bread-with-cheese. Aged Artisan Gouda is more likely to be consumed as a dessert, or in combination with a drink in the evening.

A simple model cannot predict purchasing behaviour that captures the consumer decisions when buying such a typical product. The alternative is to research the most sensitive factors and those receiving most attention in the perception of the consumer. As a consequence, the required actions in the marketing mix will be different for each product and depend on the specific situation of consumption. We present an approach that describes the several factors underlying purchasing decisions for a typical cheese like BGO. The model is also applicable for other typical food products.

Start small, be original and find the right target group. For promotion of BGO are hardly any financial means available. Therefore, for marketing of the product further co-operation needs to be established with parties that acknowledge the properties of BGO and are capable of selling the product, for example delicacy stores and restaurants. Verbal advertising will have a major contribution to marketing of the product. Above all a balance is required in the different elements of the marketing mix.

Glocalisation of BGO

BGO is a typical food product and can distinguish itself clearly from farm-cheese and regular cheese. Based on several cases about regional embedded marketing structures of different typical food products, this study shows that the aims of the BGO presidia can be more easily achieved when searching co-operation with all involved parties in the region. A lot of potential is ascribed to the combination of Slow Food and regional agriculture. Slow Food is able to gather and exchange information about production methods, gastronomic properties and cultures, thanks to modern ICT techniques. However, the aim of Slow Food International is not to create new markets. Several initiatives of regional agriculture show how typical food products can be put to market. Therefore, we recommend combining the strengths of both systems, the so-called 'glocalisation' of BGO.

Inspiring leadership in the rural area and entrepreneurship of producers is necessary, because their interests are at stake. This requires further development of the producers' skills regarding marketing and management that again necessitates the availability of tools in order to become innovative. Government should take the lead in directing this process.

Being prepared for the future

From this study we can learn that to keep BGO on the market a continuous effort of all parties involved is needed. They have to stay acquainted with changing consumer perceptions and possible market arrangements. Not only the producers of BGO, but also other producers of regional products will have to deal with the struggle how to keep their product economically healthy. When the low-cost advantage of the industrial intensive agriculture disappears, producers need to revisit their strategy, where regional co-operation structures, like BGO, have knowledge and expertise about how to deal with consumer behaviour and form an innovative contribution to a vital region. BGO in combination with the Gouda are has promising possibilities for this. More entrepreneurship and a more intense co-operation with market parties should result in a thorough market creation, in which eventually various channels will offer BGO.