

FROM FARM TO CONSUMER: ENHANCING THE VALUE OF AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS FROM MOUNTAIN COUNTRY FARMS THROUGH LOCAL GASTRONOMIC POINTS

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Abstract

Romania has a unique geographical position and gastronomic tradition, while being famous in the world for its native Romanian hospitality. The natural and anthropic heritage of the Romanian village is priceless. The beauty of people and places, traditions, customs unchanged for thousands of years, specific gastronomy, make the Romanian village an irresistible tourist attraction. Local Gastronomic Points are units represented by private kitchens in rural homes, where culinary products are prepared and served, according to recipes specific to the area, directly to the final consumer, for a maximum of 15 people; the culinary products must be prepared from raw materials coming mainly from primary production of the farm itself, as well as from local producers or from authorized/registered health, veterinary and food safety establishments. Local Gastronomic Points may be located and operate on the premises of farms, agricultural holdings, rockeries, fish farms, fish shelters, fish collection centers, hunting grounds, game collection centers, where one or more activities related to primary production are carried out: milk production, egg production, honey production, rearing of poultry/rabbits, slaughtering of poultry/rabbits on the farm, hunting of small game with feathers and fur (pheasants, partridges, ducks, geese, rabbits), fishing, aquaculture, and growing of vegetables and fruit. The menu of Local Gastronomic Points is different from the menu of other dining establishments. The daily menu includes a maximum number of prepared foods, 2 starters (hot or cold snacks/meals), 2 main courses (soups, broths, stews, etc.), 2 main courses (basic dishes) and 2 desserts. These cooked foods will be prepared and offered to consumers, fresh, on the same day. The methods of preparation of the menu will be as traditional as possible, respecting hygiene conditions at the time of preparation.

Key words: Local Gastronomic Points, mountain area, short food chain, rural development

The strategy “Farm to fork” represents a comprehensive new approach to how Europeans perceive the sustainability of food systems. It is an opportunity to improve lifestyles, health, and the environment. Creating a food-friendly environment that facilitates the choice of healthy and sustainable nutrition will benefit the health and quality of life of consumers and reduce health-related costs for society. People are paying increased attention to environmental and health aspects, as well as social and ethical considerations, and more than ever, they seek value in food products. Despite the urbanization of societies, people desire to feel closer to the food they consume. They want fresh, minimally processed, and sustainably sourced food products. Calls for shortening supply chains intensified during the epidemic years of 2019-2021. Consumers should have the opportunity to choose sustainable food products, and all actors in the food chain should view this as a responsibility and

an opportunity. The emergence of Local Gastronomic Points in Romania brings forth new opportunities worth considering for enthusiasts of rural tourism, agrotourism, ecotourism, or gastronomic tourism—those interested in the authenticity of culinary experiences. The establishment of such food service units implicitly contributes to the sustainable development of rural areas by creating jobs, maintaining cohesion within local communities, and preserving and perpetuating culinary traditions in harmony with nature.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The undertaken research concerns the legislative aspects regarding the establishment and operation of Local Gastronomic Points, their organization, location on the territory of Romania, as well as what this concept went through in order to be transposed into practice.

The activities that can take place in this type of dining structure have been described. The

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evolution of their establishment is also presented, the program for 2018 and until the end of December 2023.

As research methods, was used the study of the following documents: European strategies, orders of the president of the National Veterinary Sanitary and for Food Safety Authority, Law of Local Gastronomic Points, guides and course guides and materials, as well as observation or content analysis. Data were collected and interpreted. These come from official public sources: Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Directorates from the county, the National Agency of the Mountain Area. Collecting, synthesizing and processing data from different sources was pursued.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The "Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23" Association in Tulcea county, initiated the action related to Local Gastronomic Points since 2016. In this regard, a public consultation process was initiated, aiming to simplify the way rural households in the Danube Delta could efficiently exploit their production through small-scale public meal serving activities. In 2019, the association developed a Guide of good hygiene and culinary practices for Local Gastronomic Points.



Figure 1 "Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23" Association

Later, the idea was adopted by the "Gastro Local" Association in Vama Buzăului, Brașov county, established in 2019. Its main objective is to establish and promote Local Gastronomic Points and enhance the local gastronomic heritage. The association aims to secure fair, uniform, and constant incomes for its members, contribute to the tourism development of the area, and preserve traditional activities within households. The "Gastro Local" project aims to offer visitors to Vama Buzăului a genuine, safe, and unique culinary experience in a rural environment, promoting socialization around gastronomy. The brand "Gastro Local" has become a recognized national example of best practices, creating a niche brand, valorizing rural spaces, and contributing to the economic development of Romanian villages and local gastronomy. Recently, the Gastro Local association expanded beyond Vama Buzăului, enlisting new members from different regions of the country.



Figure 2 Logo "Gastro Local" Association

The National Agency of the Mountain Area (NAMA), a public institution under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, has been organizing professional training programs for individuals serving Local Gastronomic Points since 2021. The courses are free and can be conducted in physical, online, or hybrid formats. The course duration is 24 hours (4 days x 6 hours), and upon completion of the training program, participants receive a certificate of attendance.

The certificate can be used in the process of registering with the National Trade Register Office for the registration of Local Gastronomic Points activities, whether as an individual authorized person, individual enterprise, or, as appropriate, a family enterprise, in accordance with the provisions of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 44/2008.

The training program for Local Gastronomic Points includes the following topics/competencies:

Local Gastronomic Points – concept, legal framework, specific aspects:

- Legal registration (establishment of legal entities); Sole proprietorships (PFA), family enterprises (II, IF), Limited Liability Companies (SRL), associations, foundations, joint ventures, etc.
 - Fiscal registration and taxation of activities
 - Sanitary-veterinary registration and food safety.
- The contents of the dossier include: Standard application; Sketch of the location of the activity within the Local Gastronomic Point; Copy of the certificate of findings or, as the case may be, the registration certificate issued by the Trade Register Office of the tribunal in whose territorial jurisdiction the activity is carried out; Copy of the trade certificate for agricultural products/producer's certificate proving the ownership of animals, issued by the municipality, and in the case of hunters and fishermen, a copy of the hunter's membership card/fishing permit endorsed for the

current year by professional associations in the field in accordance with the provisions of specific legislation in force; Copy of the identity document of the legal representative of the economic operator; Proof of payment of fees established by specific legislation in force.

Organization of activities in the Local Gastronomic Point - equipment, rules for cleaning and safety of spaces, hygiene of persons serving the Local Gastronomic Point, waste management, and environmental protection.

Basic activities in Local Gastronomic Points - ensuring ingredients for food preparation (from the household or neighborhood), handling and storage of food, food preparation, welcoming guests, and serving meals.

Promotion of Local Gastronomic Points and customer loyalty - communication of offers, tools used in the promotion of the Local Gastronomic Point, customer loyalty.

The situation of graduates is presented as follows:

Table 1

The number of people who completed and graduated from the LGP course organizing by The National Agency of the Mountain Area

The Year	Number of graduates
2021	2725
2022	2309
2023	1948
Total	7562

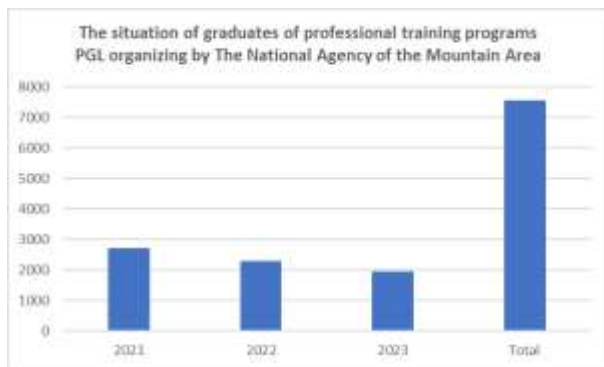


Figure 3 The situation of graduates of professional training programs LGP

Between 2021 and 2023, a total of 7562 individuals graduated from the courses designed for those serving Local Gastronomic Points. Each year, about 2000 people participated in the Local Gastronomic Point course. They come from various specializations and age groups. A distinct category is represented by university students with profiles in tourism, the food industry, or services, such as those from University of Life Sciences Iași and Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

The National Agency of the Mountain Area has been involved – through collaboration with the National Trade Register Office (ONRC), the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSSE), the Ministry of Finance (MF), and the National Agency for Fiscal Administration (ANAF) – in creating a regulatory framework for Local Gastronomic Points. This effort resulted in the classification by INSSE of the economic activity carried out in the Local Gastronomic Point (LGP) under the CAEN code 5610 - Restaurants. Additionally, it is worth mentioning the acceptance by the National Trade Register Office of Romania of the certificate issued to participants in the professional training courses organized by NAMA. This certificate is intended for individuals interested in establishing a Local Gastronomic Point and can be used in the registration process at ONRC, as a natural person authorized to carry out economic activities, individual enterprise, or, as the case may be, family enterprise, in accordance with the provisions of Emergency Government Ordinance no. 44/2008 on the conduct of economic activities by authorized natural persons, individual enterprises, and family enterprises, as subsequently amended and supplemented, approved with amendments and completions by Law no. 182/2016.



Figure 4 Logo of the National Agency of the Mountain Area

The Legislative framework for establishing the Local Gastronomic Points:

With the emergence of the concept of Local Gastronomic Points, specific legislation has been developed. The main normative acts regulating this occupation are as follows:

Order No. 111/2008 approving the Veterinary and Food Safety Standard regarding the procedure for veterinary health registration and food safety of activities involving the direct and/or retail sale of food products of animal or non-

animal origin, as well as the activities of production, processing, storage, transport, and marketing of non-animal origin food products.

Order No. 106/2019 amending and supplementing the Veterinary and Food Safety Standard regarding the procedure for veterinary health registration and food safety, activities involving the direct and/or retail sale of food products of animal or non-animal origin, as well as the activities of production, processing, storage, transport, and marketing of non-animal origin food products, approved by the Order of the President of the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority No. 111/2008.

Law of the Establishment and Functioning of Local Gastronomic Points, No. 412 of December 18, 2023.



Figure 5 Logo of the Local Gastronomic Points

In accordance with the aforementioned law, the Local Gastronomic Point is a unit for promoting local primary production, located in a rural area, where food products are prepared and served according to specific regional recipes, directly to the end consumer, for a maximum of 15 people simultaneously (the number of consumers has been extended from 12 people, as provided in Order 111, to 15 people).

The rural locality is represented by commune center villages, component villages of communes, and villages belonging to municipalities or cities.

The local plan is represented by the administrative-territorial unit to which the Local Gastronomic Point belongs and/or the place of residence of the person who owns the Local Gastronomic Point, as well as the neighboring administrative-territorial units.

The food products in the Local Gastronomic Point's offer are prepared from locally available raw materials, primarily sourced from the primary production at the level of one's own farm, producers, fishermen, hunters, gatherers, and non-wood forest product collectors.

The Local Gastronomic Point can operate in existing premises in private homes, farms, fish farms, mountain pastures, apiaries, cellars, fishing shelters, hunting grounds, game breeding farms, hunting complexes, mushroom and berry collection centers, game collection centers, forest ranger offices, monasteries, as well as in other constructions and facilities in a rural area where one or more activities related to the primary production of agricultural products, fishing, hunting, harvesting, or collecting non-wood forest products take place.

The Local Gastronomic Point can be established by individuals and legal entities, respecting the current legal provisions regarding the veterinary health registration and food safety of this type of unit, at the Veterinary and Food Safety Directorate in the county where it operates.

The veterinary health registration and food safety of the Local Gastronomic Point by individuals are carried out based on the producer's certificate accompanied by a copy of the trade certificate, the hunter's membership card for the current year, the commercially endorsed fishing permit for the current year, or the authorization for the collection of non-wood forest products issued by the competent authorities, as applicable, in accordance with the provisions of the current specific legislation.

The veterinary health registration and food safety of the Local Gastronomic Point by legal entities are carried out based on the registration certificate issued by the National Trade Register Office, having CAEN codes proving that they carry out one or more activities related to agricultural production,

fishing or hunting, and the collection of non-wood forest products, in accordance with the provisions of the current specific legislation. The establishment of a Local Gastronomic Point by individuals who are local producers is done based on the producer's certificate/trade certificate for agricultural products.

The income generated by individuals as a result of operating as a Local Gastronomic Point constitutes income from independent activities for which the annual net income is determined based on income norms, according to the provisions of Law no. 227/2015 on the Fiscal Code, with subsequent amendments and completions.

By derogation from the provisions of Article 69 paragraph (2) of Law no. 227/2015, with subsequent amendments and completions, the annual income norms, by categories of localities, depending on the location of the Local Gastronomic Point, as well as their correction coefficients, are established by order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, through its subordinate structures, annually submits to the National Tax Administration Agency the level of annual income norms and their correction coefficients during the fourth quarter, but no later than November 30 of the previous year in which they are to be applied.

To maximize the use of primary production and accelerate rural development, including services in rural areas, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development supports the development of Local Gastronomic Points through specific actions of information, promotion, and dissemination online: media websites, mobile applications, and any other mass communication means.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, through its national, county, or local subordinate units, may organize free professional training courses for individuals or legal entities wishing to establish a Local Gastronomic Point, within the competencies established by legislation.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development will propose measures to provide support for the establishment or

support of Local Gastronomic Points, within the budgetary provisions.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, through the National Agency of Mountain Area, compiles and manages the Register of Local Gastronomic Points based on data from the public list that can be consulted/accessed on the website of the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority.

By derogation from the provisions of Article 4 of Law no. 227/2015, with subsequent amendments and completions, the provisions of Article 7 apply starting with the income of the fiscal year following the publication in the Official Gazette of this law.

For the year 2024, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, through its subordinate structures, submits to the National Tax Administration Agency the level of annual income norms and their correction coefficients by December 31, 2023.

There has been a significant increase in the number of Local Gastronomic Points since 2019, almost doubling in 2021, amid a declining market for public catering units and reluctance to develop new businesses in the food sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of December 2023, there were a total of 315 Local Gastronomic Points in Romania, of which 201 – representing 63.81% of the total – were in the extended mountainous area (which includes 948 localities). These small businesses harmoniously complement the existing tourism offer in the mountainous regions.

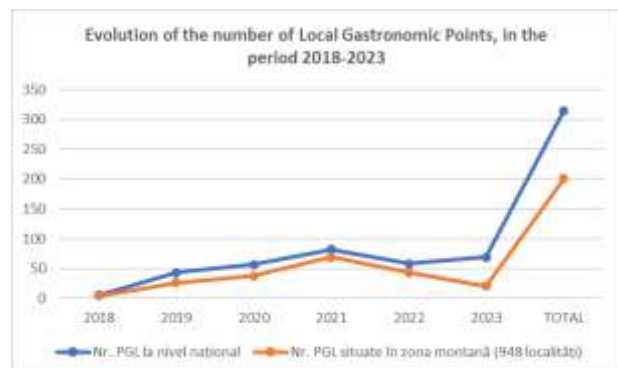


Figure 6 Evolution of the number of Local Gastronomic Points, in the period 2018-2023



Figure 7 **Distribution of Local Gastronomic Points across the territory of Romania**

It is observed that Local Gastronomic Points are concentrated in areas with tourist potential, especially in mountainous regions and the Danube Delta. There is a growing interest in opening such food establishments, which efficiently capitalize on household agri-food products through the short food supply chain: „from farm to fork”.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of sustainable tourism in the rural area and especially in the mountain area and the Danube Delta represents a factor in valuing natural and human resources, increasing the standard of living, stabilizing the population, maintaining cultural identity, increasing economic power at local and national level, in the conditions of preserving the ecological balance and protecting the natural environment.

This type of organization supports those who produce basic food and want to offer public food services in complete safety for the consumer, without owning tourist guesthouses or other organized forms of tourism. It is a facility for family-type units that want to provide small-scale tourism: gastronomic tourism, agritourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism and others.

Local Gastronomic Points are represented by small, private kitchens where traditional cooking is done by ordinary people with culinary talent, people who know local recipes handed down from generation to generation.

Eating food in a LGP represents living an experience based on fundamental values: sociability, authenticity, simplicity, sustainability, sharing/sharing food, words and parts of the soul with the people who are at the same table with you and with the host.

LGP visitors are viewed by the hosts rather as guests, with all that means opening the house for them / welcoming into the house an unknown person who comes to visit and for whom you put

on the table the food and drink available at that moment. A visitor of a LGP is a guest and not a simple consumer, the consumer being often identified as having a simple source of income, part of a commercial transaction.

Some of the expressions that can characterize the food prepared in LGP are: "it's like at mother's home", "it's like at grandmother's", "it's like at the country side", "it's like in the old days", "it's like in the Delta", "it's like at the Mountain", "it's like at the sheep farm", etc.

The local food is prepared according to traditional culinary recipes specific to the area and is cooked and served directly to the final consumer by the person operating the LGP.

The development of LGPs will form the basis for the development of a strategy for national gastronomic tourism. By creating short food chains, from the perspective of opening the market opportunity for farmers, by promoting and selling agricultural products close to the source of production, in accordance with the objectives of the European "from farm to consumer" strategy, will be created the premises for the transition to a healthier and more sustainable food system.

However, in order to have a complete regulatory framework, including fiscal requirements, it is necessary to define the Local Gastronomic Point as a public food unit in Annex no. 1 of GD 843/1999 and the subsequent establishment of the fiscal requirement framework of these units, especially those legally organized in the form of APP, IE or FE.

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