

Artisanal cheeses: concepts and perceptions of cheesemakers and consumers in southern Brazil

ABSTRACT – The concept of artisanal products has been largely discussed, mainly due to concerns about the inappropriate use of the term that may cause confusion for consumers. Cheeses are important “food models” to evaluate consumers’ and producers’ perception about artisanal foods worldwide. In the current literature, there is a gap that hinders a deeply understanding of the concepts and perceptions of consumers and producers regarding artisanal foods, and how they are linked. Therefore, the objective of the present study was to evaluate the perception of consumers and cheesemakers toward artisanal foods, focusing on artisan cheeses. In order to discuss the topic, two focus groups were organized with cheese producers and consumers. “Colonial” and “serrano” cheese types were used as food models for the discussion. Producers and consumers associated artisan foods to small-scale production, handicraft, and freshness. Affective memories were also an important issue related to artisanal cheeses. For cheesemakers, artisan cheeses should be produced with unpasteurized milk, which was not mentioned by consumers. Consumers disclosed the intention to pay a premium price for food products that present artisan seals, mainly due to the guarantee of acquiring a quality product. The confusion about artisanal and traditional food concepts were observed, which is a subject to be further deeply evaluated. The findings provide useful issues for policy-makers and institutions that can influence citizens’ attitudes and consumption patterns of artisanal products.

Index terms: handicraft, craft, *serrano* cheese, *colonial* cheese, focus group, perception.

Queijos artesanais: conceitos e percepções de queijeiros e consumidores na região sul do Brasil


RESUMO – O conceito de produtos artesanais tem sido amplamente discutido, principalmente quanto às preocupações com o uso inadequado do termo, o que pode causar confusão aos consumidores. Os queijos são “modelos alimentares” importantes para se avaliar a percepção dos consumidores e produtores sobre os alimentos artesanais em todo o mundo. Na literatura atual, há uma lacuna que dificulta o entendimento profundo dos conceitos e percepções de consumidores e produtores sobre alimentos artesanais e como eles estão ligados. Assim, o objetivo do presente estudo foi avaliar a percepção de consumidores e queijeiros quanto aos alimentos artesanais, com foco nos queijos artesanais. Para discutir o tema, dois grupos focais foram organizados com produtores de queijo e consumidores. Os queijos dos tipos colonial e serrano foram utilizados como modelos alimentares para

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a discussão. Produtores e consumidores relacionaram os alimentos artesanais à produção em pequena escala, ao artesanato e ao frescor. As memórias afetivas também foram uma questão importante relacionada aos queijos artesanais. Para os queijeiros, os queijos artesanais devem ser produzidos com leite não pasteurizado, o que não foi citado pelos consumidores. Os consumidores revelaram a intenção de pagar um preço *premium* por produtos alimentícios que apresentem selos artesanais, principalmente pela garantia de aquisição de um produto de qualidade. Observou-se a confusão sobre os conceitos de alimentação artesanal e tradicional, assunto a ser mais profundamente avaliado. As conclusões fornecem questões úteis para os formuladores de políticas públicas e instituições, que podem influenciar as atitudes dos cidadãos e os padrões de consumo de produtos artesanais.

Termos para indexação: artesanal, arte, queijo serrano, queijo colonial, grupo focal, percepção.

INTRODUCTION

Cheeses are dairy products consumed worldwide, and it has countless types considered traditional and cultural food. Brazilian artisanal cheeses have historical, socioeconomic and environmental importance, since they are typically produced by cheese makers with small scale production, following traditional techniques proper from each region (Kimimura et al., 2019), as the *serrano* cheese, which are be produced with cattle fed native pasture, reducing the both the implantation of monoculture within the region and its negative impacts (Ambrosini et al., 2012; Krone & Menasche, 2019; Ceolin et al., 2020). *Canastra*, *minas*, *serro*, *cerrado*, and *araxá* cheese types are typically products in southeast Brazil; *marajó* cheese, in the North; butter and curd cheeses in the Northeast; *Kaipara* cheese in the canter region of Brazil; meanwhile *colonial* and *serrano* cheeses are traditional dairy products in southern Brazil (Kimimura et al., 2019). Most producers commercialize the dairy products as complement family incoming, and these products are carried out informally, without sanitary inspection (Cruz & Menasche, 2014; Kimimura et al., 2019; Steinbach et al., 2021). Therefore, traditional cheeses in Brazil are usually produced in a homemade or handcraft way.

In the past decades, the demand for artisanal, handcraft, homemade foods showed a huge growth, and the size of the global market of handicraft reached US\$ 48,165 million in 2020, and it is expected to grow up to 8.41% during 2022-2027, reaching the market size of US\$ 1.2 billion (Business Research Insights, 2022). This phenomenon is highly related to the “quality turn” debate (Goodman, 2003), in which cultural, social, environmental, and territorial aspects, besides other benefits are perceived as the quality of a food not rarely overcoming sanitary and sensory issues. In this context, emerges the “craftwashing” concern, which relies on the use of deceptive marketing practices by big industries that introduce craft-like brands (Rivaroli et al., 2020). Nowadays, labeling new foods as handicraft, homemade, or artisanal has been a common practice by fast-food chains (for instance, pizzas, chicken, ice cream, soda), as a strategy to attract more consumers and enhance sales, leading to much confusion over the term, and to a dilution of its distinctive character (Howard, 2018; Rivaroli et al., 2020).

In a wide range review on scientific articles about artisanal foods, the authors concluded that the best option would be to identify national definitions, possibly based on shared and harmonized guidelines, mainly considering important differences for culture worldwide (Rivaroli et al., 2020). These authors also noted a huge lack of information in developing countries, mainly in southern hemisphere countries. Pereira et al. (2023a) observed the presence of ARTE seal on cheese label has a negative impact on sensory acceptance of the product by Brazilian consumers, although it evokes positive emotions.

Consumers’ behavior and attitudes toward foods are extremely complex objects of study (Poulain & Proença, 2003). In a dynamic world, where people have access to information and have the possibility to constantly give opinions through digital media, studying and evaluating consumers’ and entrepreneurs’ perception about public policy topics is important to avoid confusion

over terms and dilution distinctive character, such as artisanal foods. Thus, it is necessary to articulate knowledge in different scientific areas, such as economics, epidemiology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, nutrition, history, and technological disciplines, among others (Poulain & Proença, 2003; Goulart et al., 2020).

Within these contexts, the present work aimed to evaluate the perception of consumers and cheesemakers of *serrano* and *colonial* cheeses in Brazil, regarding artisanal cheeses. Also, perception and behavior toward the Brazilian artisanal seal, as long as motivations to join the seal (cheesemakers) and buy products with it onto their label (consumers) were evaluated. On this basis, a holistic discussion about artisanal foods was also performed, in order to contribute to the complex area of the subject studied.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Artisanal foods

Currently, there is no single definition or international harmonization of norms regarding artisan food (Rivaroli et al., 2020; Lingham et al., 2022). European Union's countries have established guidelines on the use of the term "artisanal"; and for labelling foods as "artisanal", some criteria were identified – such as the nature or quality of the ingredients, the production process, and the production at a small scale (Italia, 2016; SPF Économie, 2017). In the United States of America and Asia, there is no formal definition of "craft" or "artisanal" (Kasapila & Shaarani, 2011; Rivaroli et al., 2020). In Brazil, the Law nº 13680 from June 2018 established the concept of artisanal foods (Brasil, 2018), and the Decree nº 11099 from June 2022 regulated the production and commercialization of artisanally produced food of animal origin (Brasil, 2022a).

The first legal and formal definition of traditional food was introduced in Italy by the Ministry of Agriculture, which described

traditional foods as "agro-industrial products whose methods of processing, storage, and maturation are consolidated over time in accordance with uniformity and consistent local use" (Italia, 1999). This definition refers to food requiring maturation periods, such as cheese and cured meat, when products are stored for a specific time to allow of biochemical and microbiological reactions to occur, resulting in specific sensory attributes and microbiological stabilization. In 2006, the European Union defined "traditional" as usage proven in the community market over time, indicating the transmission of this usage across generations; according to European resolution, this period should be generally attributed to a "human generation" of at least 25 years (European Union, 2006). In Brazil, the law provides the concept for foods of animal origin and defines them as "food products of animal origin produced in an artisanal way, that is, edible products subject to the control of the official inspection body, made from raw materials of animal origin of own production or of specific origin, which predominantly results from manual techniques adopted by individuals who hold the wholly control of the production process, whose final manufacturing product is individualized and genuine, which maintains the uniqueness and the product's own cultural, regional, or traditional characteristics" (Brasil, 2022a).

Traditional food products are perceived as items consumed daily or frequently, integral to everyday life, or associated with specific celebrations or seasons. They are commonly transmitted across generations, prepared with precision in accordance with gastronomic heritage, with minimal or no industrial processing, distinctive handling, and renowned sensory properties. They are often linked to a particular locality, region, or country. Consumers associate traditional foods with habit and routine (Guerrero et al., 2009). According to Jordana (2000), the concept of traditional food products encompasses attributes related to health, naturalness, artisanal methods, farm-made

processes, and the absence of industrial manipulation and additives. The author further asserts that traditional foods possess unique qualitative characteristics, tied to cultural identity and territory, and should be part of a set of traditions that ensure continuity over time.

In a study involving European consumers, Guerrero et al. (2009) found that traditional foods are generally perceived as simple, with low complexity, leaning toward basic, natural, and pure products. These characteristics imply minimal or no processing or manipulation after primary production. To be considered traditional, not only a product should contain traditional ingredients, but it should also exhibit characteristics processed using traditional methods, adhering to recipes passed down through generations.

The notion of “traditional” is also closely tied to food origin. In this regard, European consumers, as noted by Guerrero et al. (2009), agreed that traditions cannot be exported. Giraud (1998) proposed that traditional products themselves cannot be exported. Local products outside their area of influence – be it location, region, or country – are perceived merely as regular products, thus losing much or all the additional values and emotions attributed to their origin, production, and/or local distribution.

However, in a globalized world, traditions can be exported, recreated, or replaced, as exemplified by the Brazilian population’s adoption of poultry consumption during end-of-year celebrations. Nevertheless, time and habitual use emerge as critical factors for transforming even nontraditional products into traditional ones. Ingredients and food preparation systems are intrinsic to the identity of foods and, by association, to the people who consume them (Fajans, 2006). In this context, the transmission of knowledge across generations constitutes a decisive factor (Guerrero et al., 2016).

Therefore, traditional foods are produced with raw materials and production methods

intrinsically linked to the culture and traditions of a specific territory, reflecting the characteristics of the society to which they belong. These foods are crafted with history, for which time is an essential element, and prepared in simple ways with little to no processing, embodying the art of knowledge passed down through families across generations (Guerrero et al., 2016).

Artisanal seal

The creation of a trademark or logo for artisanal products would help craftsmen and vendors to have their “products highly recognizable and giving them a strong differentiating element on the market” (Rivaroli et al., 2020, p.30). According to Balogh et al. (2016, p.182), “effective certification and regulatory systems are vital to realize higher mark ups and protect the integrity of TFPs”.

In Brazil, businesses that follow the requisites of artisanal foods described by Brazil (Brasil, 2019) are able to use the ARTE seal (Figure 1) onto their products’ label. Artisanal cheeses show their own logo, according to Brazil (Brasil, 2022c) (Figure 2).

Coelho et al. (2024) observed that there are significant gaps in the Brazilian law related to artisanal products that hinder the formal commercialization of such products and the regularization of rural agro-industries. However, these seals are not quite valued currently by Brazilian consumers due to low familiarity to them (Pereira et al., 2023a), indicating that it is important to enhance consumers’ knowledge about it. Also, it is essential to enhance legislation at the federal, state, and municipal levels to encourage the legalization of food processing activities in rural agro-industries, particularly those operated by family-based businesses (Coelho et al., 2024).

Pereira et al. (2023a) observed that the artisanal seal was associated with positive emotions, which is similar to the behavior

shown when both seals were on cheese labels during the tasting of the dairy product. However, Pereira et al. (2023b) reported the existence of three distinct consumer groups regarding willingness-to-purchase: those who strongly prefer cheeses with a sanitary seal (assigning a relative importance of 80.2% to the seal); and those who favor cheeses with an artisanal seal (assigning a relative importance of 52.5% to the seal), and those for whom the presence of either seal did not significantly affects acceptance.

Thus, further studies are crucial to understanding consumers' attitudes and perception towards artisanal trademarks and logos to correctly value these important products.



Figure 1. ARTE seal according to Brazil. Source: Brasil (2022c).



Figure 2. ARTE seal for cheeses. Source: Brasil (2022c).

Consumers' perception of artisanal cheeses

Current literature indicates clearly that consumers are willing to pay more for artisanal food, feeling that it tastes better, is healthier, and helps support family-owned operations (Cirne et al., 2019; Ziemann et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2023a, 2023b). Producers not only want to be able to control their businesses, but also wish to create better and more-authentic food in an environmentally friendly manner (Cirne et al., 2019). Homemade cheeses were related to positive feelings/attitudes, and consumption was the most common one among the words associated to these cheeses. Results indicate that the majority of feelings and attitudes were positive (delicious, health, quality, safety), rather than negative (expensive, greasy, coliforms) for all analyzed cheeses (Ziemann et al., 2022).

Colonial cheese – a traditional-cultural dairy product in southern Brazil – is described as pleasant and able to promote satisfaction well-being, and happiness. Also, *colonial* cheese consumers perceive it as a product with a cultural identity, seen as an expression of historical knowledge, produced in a way that respects the environment and has relevance to the economy of the places where it is produced (Ambrosini et al., 2020).

Schouteten et al. (2015) also observed that cheeses tend to be associated more with positive emotions like gladness, happiness, and enthusiasm. Rodrigues et al. (2021), evaluated Canastra cheese, a traditional dairy product from southeast Brazil, and observed that consumers present high positive feelings about the product. Southern Brazil consumers associated the consumption and purchase of open-market dairy products to feelings of willing, happiness, curiosity, and surprise (Silva et al., 2021), and feelings from consumers of *colonial* cheese showed 23% average of positive or pro *colonial* cheese statements, 74% neutral,

and only 3% negative (Steinbach et al., 2021). These results corroborate those reported for Vermont artisanal cheese, for which sensory perception was observed to be a social, active and reflexive practices and consumers' acceptance stems from both intrinsic and extrinsic qualities, since it is embedded in social context (Lahne & Trubek, 2014). Ambrosini et al. (2020) reported that *colonial* cheese has a positive reputation with consumers, presenting characteristics such as taste, cost-benefit ratio, following hygiene standards that meet the emotional and functional needs of consumption. Consumers of Canastra cheeses reported feelings of "happiness" and "pleasure" during home-use tests (Rodrigues et al., 2021).

Thus, artisanal cheeses evoke positive emotions and are perceived by consumers as a product of good taste, besides being socio-environmentally friendly. But, the concept of artisanal food products remains unclear, mainly on how consumers and producers understand these products, and further works are necessary in current literature.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Volunteers's sampling

Cheesemakers were recruited by sharing an online invitation to participate of the focus group by technicians from Emater/ASCAR

(regional public institution that works with rural extension in Brazil) and municipal agricultural secretaries. The recruitment of consumers took place using social media advertising, targeting cheese consumers older than 18 years of age. Within the invitation, a brief explanation about the objective of the meeting was given. The interest to participate, main sociodemographic profile, cheese factory production (for cheesemakers), and the email address were data asked to schedule the meeting.

Among consumers, 101 people answered to the online survey and, for the focus group meeting, four individuals from the metropolitan region of Rio Grande do Sul, and five ones who live in the countryside were available to join the meeting to discuss the topics. The criterium for the recruitment was the willingness to participate in the focus group and the availability of time for the meeting. Their profile, whose names were substituted to pseudonymous in order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents are described below (Table 1).

From the recruited cheesemakers, five people registered in the municipal sanitary inspection agencies answered and participated. Within cheesemakers who produce and commercialize cheeses informally, three people answered the invitation. As to type of cheese produced, two cheesemakers produced *serrano* cheeses in the countryside region, which had

Table 1. Profile of the consumers.

Pseudonym	Age	Local	Education level
Thiago	36	Countryside	Complete college
Elizabete	25	Countryside	Complete college
Paola	29	Metropolitan	Complete high school
Marinete	55	Countryside	Complete high school
Cláudia	42	Countryside	Complete college
Márcia	39	Countryside	Complete college
Nelson	45	Metropolitan	Post-graduation
Catarina	25	Metropolitan	Complete college
Vicente	31	Metropolitan	Post-graduation

sanitary inspection regulations and the ARTE seal, and six *colonial* cheeses – one produced in the metropolitan region, and five in the countryside – half of these *colonial* cheeses had no sanitary inspection, and none had the ARTE seal (Table 2). The criterium for the recruitment was also the willingness to participate in the focus group and the availability of time for the meeting.

Following the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, participants gave an informed consent to participate, before the beginning of the focus group.

Focus group dynamics

The focus group met online via Google Meet platform and took between 40 minutes and 75 minutes, for cheesemakers and consumers respectively, between September and October 2022. Before the meeting, participants agreed to participate and consented to record the meeting via an online form, which was previously approved by the Ethics Committee of Universidade Estadual do Rio Grande do Sul (Certificate of Presentation of Ethical Appreciation number 58048022.7.0000.8091).

Focus groups with consumers and with producers were conducted independently by a highly experience in qualitative research moderator not previously involved in the project.

Consumers were asked about their perception of artisanal food concept; what was it the main motivation to purchase an artisanal cheese; what do they observed onto cheese label. Participants were shown the seal and asked if they had seen it before, what did it remind them of, and if they would pay more for a product with it on the label. Cheesemakers were asked about their sociodemographic profile; if they had sanitary inspection seal; if they presented the ARTE seal; what is an artisanal product; the motivation to the ARTE seal adhesion; and possible limitations to adhere to the ARTE seal.

Data analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed by the triangulation methodology as described by Minayo (2010). Briefly, videos of the focal groups were watched by two researchers independently; and answers to the question and personal comments were noted in the survey. A third researcher carefully evaluated the convergence of the data, and if there was a perfect match, the sentences were kept; otherwise, they were reanalyzed until an agreement within the three selected researchers was reached. Then, the recorded meetings were watched again, to grab the entire sentence that volunteer said to transcribe into the manuscript. Hypotheses, methods, and an analytic plan were specified prior to data collection to avoid biases.

Table 2. Profile of the cheesemakers.

Pseudonym	Age	Local	Type of cheese	Sanitary inspection	Does it have ARTE seal?
Petrucio	45	Countryside	<i>Serrano</i>	Yes	Yes
Sérgio	62	Countryside	<i>Serrano</i>	Yes	Yes
Maria	44	Countryside	<i>Colonial</i>	Yes	No
Luiza	45	Countryside	<i>Colonial</i>	Yes	No
Fernanda	43	Metropolitan	<i>Colonial</i>	Yes	No
Joselita	40	Countryside	<i>Colonial</i>	No	No
Marta	56	Countryside	<i>Colonial</i>	No	No
Candice	57	Countryside	<i>Colonial</i>	No	No
Clair	59	Countryside	<i>Colonial</i>	No	No

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

People's perceptions about artisanal foods presents a huge spectrum; analyzing them is important for a proper definition of food policies by governments and industries' marketing sectors. For cheesemakers, the main perception about the concept of artisanal foods is related to small scale production, such as that expressed by Petrucio, as follows:

Petrucio, cheesemaker: "It is small production; own production, family production (verbal information)¹."

Based on that concept, the cheesemakers Luiza and Maria contributed with an important information:

Luiza, cheesemaker: "For me, artisanal means production made by the producer with his hands and small production. A thousand liters a day will not be artisanal, there is no such thing; and then, you will have to use equipment, even pasteurization, not slow pasteurization or raw milk. It will have to be limited: 'artisanal production is up to so many liters'(verbal information)²."

Maria, cheesemaker: "For me, it is related to quantity and the way of producing: small quantity and own production, or buying from a producer – knowing where the milk comes from. The industry gathers everything into the truck and gets lost. You know what milk you are processing and producing. Also, it means doing it with your own hands, using little equipment and does not use additives or preservatives (verbal information)³."

The perception that artisanal foods should be claimed only on small production scale and handicraft was also observed on not legalized cheesemakers:

Joselita, cheesemaker: "I think it is homemade cheese in the kitchen (verbal information)⁴."

Marta, cheesemaker: "Me too. It is a handmade product, with nothing from the factory (verbal information)⁵."

Since informal production is performed in household level, it is usual the cheese making activity in the home kitchen (Fagnani et al., 2019; Steinbach et al., 2021).

The same perception concept was observed in the consumers' speech:

Thiago, consumer: "It is more homemade, more rustic production. The preparation and 'seasoning' are passed from generation to generation. It has more limited production (verbal information)⁶."

Elizabete, consumer: "Artisanal cheese is that produced on a small scale on small properties. You don't use all that industrial dairy machinery. Then, there are more selectivity (verbal information)⁷."

Currently, the small-scale production aspect has not received a lot of consideration in scientific literature, and there is a lack of a deeper discussion on the issue toward artisanal concept (Rivaroli et al., 2020). Abouab & Gomez (2015) reported that the higher is human contact during food production, the higher is the consumer's credence of product craftsmanship and naturalness because human processes are perceived as being more respectful of food integrity. Moreover, the low technology intrusion, during the production process, and a high degree of human involvement, increase the consumer's perception of product craftsmanship (Rivaroli et al., 2020). Also, consumers consider local foods a more sustainable choice, due to the short transport chain in addition to the importance

¹ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Petrucio.

² Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Luiza.

³ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Maria.

⁴ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Joselita.

⁵ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Marta.

⁶ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Thiago.

⁷ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Elizabete.

to support provided to local economies (Autio et al., 2013). Fonte (2008) also considers that reducing the distance between producers and consumers is beneficial for natural resources, and calls the attention to cultural and biological diversity, bringing economic sustainability for farmers, social justice, and food sovereignty. In Brazil, Fagnani et al. (2019) reported that 54% of Brazilian consumers purchase informal milk and dairy products. Most colonial cheeses in southern Brazil are purchased and consumed in short food chains, such as street markets, cheese factories, or directly from producers (Steinbach et al., 2021), and these cheeses present no label or official seals, even for consumers who live in metropolitan regions. This fact may be seen on Nelson and Vicente speech, as follows:

Nelson, consumer: “*Colonial* cheeses have often no label (verbal information)⁸.”

Vicente, consumer: “Indeed, many cheeses that I buy do not have a label. We buy in confidence and for the taste of the cheese from the producer (verbal information)⁹.”

Pereira et al. (2023a) observed that cheeses without any seal on cheese front-label had significant higher acceptance than those with sanitary inspection or the ARTE seal. Additionally, the presence of sanitary inspection seal on cheese label evokes some negative emotions on Brazilian consumers.

Silva et al. (2021) observed that an important segment of consumers in southern Brazil associates open-market dairy product consumption with knowledge of the product and belief in the seller.

Also, Cruz & Menasche (2014) observed that consumers, producers, and traders of *serrano* cheeses emphasized the importance of buying cheeses from someone they know, which is closely related to the cheese production

in small family farms and to the short-chain commercialization of artisanal products.

Lahne & Trubek (2014) suggested that consumers combine information on producer practice, social context, and the materiality of the product through an active, learned practice of sensory perception.

In line with the valorization of the holistic quality of foods, now quality is not only associated with that base on industrial systems concepts, but also with quality that allows consumers to recognize the origin of food and the way in which raw materials are produced. Knowing the producer provides the guarantee of acquiring a quality product, through relationships of trust and reputation (Goodmann, 2003; Cruz & Schneider, 2010; Cruz & Menasche, 2014; Ambrosini et al., 2020). Also, the valorization of the perceived safety benefits, ethical associations, and improved taste of local foods is critical for artisanal products (Autio et al., 2013). The quality convention (Goodmann, 2003) that overlaps the industry standard is correlated to trust based on networks of interpersonal relationships (Granovetter, 2007) that are embedded in the producers’ tradition of knowledge. This reconnection among producers and consumers contributes to the “valorization of the origin of food” (Fonte, 2008), to the reposition of local food production in relation to its values, and to associate production practices in the territory and the tradition of social actors.

Two other important perceptions showed up, when volunteers discussed the concept of artisanal foods as “affective memory” and “freshness”:

Luiza, cheesemaker: “It rescues flavors (verbal information)¹⁰.”

Joselita, cheesemaker: “Homemade cheese in the kitchen. Cheese made from raw milk, and it’s pure (verbal information)¹¹.”

⁸ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Nelson.

⁹ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Vicente.

¹⁰ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Luiza.

¹¹ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Joselita.

Candice, cheesemaker: “Also, it is freshly made, fresh cheese: take the milk and curdle it ((verbal information)¹².”

Marta, cheesemaker: “For me, it is homemade without any preservatives(verbal information)¹³.”

Cláudia, consumer: “It must have no preservative like in dairy industry (verbal information)¹⁴.”

Paola, consumer: “For sure, it is without any preservatives (verbal information)¹⁵.”

Marinete, consumer: “In addition to everything they said, it has to do with the affection and the whim that people do (verbal information)¹⁶.”

Naturalness has been pointed out as an important perception about artisanal foods, since it is recognized as more respectful of food integrity and nature, whose clear evidence is that the concept of naturalness derives from the use of fresh and local raw materials, without additives or artificial flavorings (Rivaroli et al., 2020). This behavior is observed for other kinds of foods such as beers, fruit juices, bread, and general foods, for which consumers emphasize the relevance of additive-free attribute of artisanal products (Autio et al., 2013; Rivaroli et al., 2020).

Affective memories are rarely cited as important perceptions in current literature. Artisanal cheeses are related to consumption in earlier times of people, in which they visited their relatives in the countryside region and got access to these products, and this fact reminds people of their childhood memories (Menasche, 2009). According to Fonte (2008), this perspective refers to the dimension of time, tradition, and history. Raw materials and flavors are part of a food culture closely linked to territorial identity

and connected to family occurrences, and specific religious or social celebrations. This is an important aspect to two consumers who live in the metropolitan region, as they state the following:

Nelson, consumer: “I have lived in the capital for 30 years, but I grew up in the interior, and *colonial* cheese reminds me a lot of the time when my mother and grandfather bought cheese from the neighbor (verbal information)¹⁷.”

Vicente, consumer: “I have lived my whole life in the capital, but my grandparents are from the countryside and made cheeses. My stepfather has a sale and buys cheeses from the countryside to sell here. So, we have the habit of consuming a lot of *colonial* cheeses (verbal information)¹⁸.”

Also, for Paola, a consumer who has lived in southeast Brazil, the consumption of *colonial* cheeses is related to affective memories:

Paola, consumer: “Since I now live in São Paulo, eating *colonial* cheeses for me are like drinking *chimarrão* [a traditional hot drinking beverage made with *yerba mate* (*Ilex paraguariensis*)] (verbal information)¹⁹.”

The importance given to this characteristic denotes that human food is seen as more than the satisfaction of physiological needs, not only being a source of health, but also being a cause of well-being and associated with moments of pleasure. In addition to biological and nutritional aspects, humans feed on imagination and meanings (Fischler, 1995). Also, since acceptance and purchase intention of food is a complex phenomenon, and that nonsensory attributes have a direct impact on these issues, labels are key factors to food industries to interact with consumers, and they actually impact on product acceptance (Schouteten et al., 2015; Pereira et al., 2023a).

¹² Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Candice.

¹³ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Marta.

¹⁴ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Claudia.

¹⁵ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Paola.

¹⁶ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Marinete.

¹⁷ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Nelson.

¹⁸ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Vicente.

¹⁹ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Paola.

As claimed above and emphasized by the cheesemaker Sérgio, the production with raw milk was also highlighted. This perception is important for artisanal cheeses specifically.

Sérgio, cheesemaker: “Artisanal in my case here is raw milk (verbal information verbal)²⁰.”

Kupiec & Revell (1998) and Di Monaco et al. (2005) refer to craft cheese as being produced at small scale, which is not manufactured on a regular basis and depends on the availability of raw material. This feature is valued for several artisanal cheeses in Brazil (Kimiura et al., 2019). In the discussion related to the food safety of artisanal, unpasteurized milk cheese, it was said that the intrinsic microbiota of milk ends up producing products with unique sensory characteristics which are perceived by consumers. Also, the traditional production of cheeses at small scale is processed with raw milk, which brings this feature as a cultural property of the dairy product (Cruz & Menasche, 2014; Kimiura et al., 2019; Steinbach et al., 2021).

At this point, it should be highlighted that these answers were given in the discussion about the concept of artisanal foods, which brings the information that these intangible attributes are essential to further artisanal and handcraft projects' frameworks. Therefore, an important discussion herein is the misalignment of the concept of artisanal foods, which seems to be a mixture of the traditional food concept. The European Union (2006) defined “traditional” as the proven use in a community market for a period (at least 25 years) showing the transmission of this use between generations. The concept of “traditional food products”, according to Jordana (2000), includes aspects related to health, naturalness, handicraft, made on the farm, without industrial handling, and without additives; this author also defines traditional foods as products with qualitative characteristics and linked to aspects of cultural identity and territory, and that they must be part

of a range of traditions which necessarily ensure their continuity over time.

Guerrero et al. (2009) observed that, based on the perceptions of consumers, traditional foods are consumed by people every day, or quite frequently, besides being part of everyday life and commonly used, or associated with specific celebrations and/or seasons. These foods are usually passed down from generation to generation, and they made in a precise way, according to the gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing, and its handling is distinguished and known for its sensory properties, and it is associated with a particular area, region, or country. Consumers associate traditional foods with the habit. These references show a similar profile to most described ones in the present work either by producer or consumers. Even in Brazilian regulation of artisanal cheeses (Brasil, 2019), the concept of traditional is described as follows: i) artisanal cheeses are defined as those prepared by traditional methods, with territorial, regional, or cultural linkage and valorization, according to the specific elaboration protocol established for each type and variety, and with the use of good agricultural practices in artisanal production and manufacturing, among other characteristics; ii) artisanal meat products are those produced by traditional methods, with territorial, regional, or cultural linkage and valorization, according to the protocol of specific elaboration established for each type and variety, and with the use of good agricultural and manufacturing practices.

However, are traditional foods equal to artisanal foods? Traditional foods may be produced as handcraft product, although the opposite is not true. For example, a bakery product is not a traditional food in Brazil, but it can be produced by handcraft. Similar thought is applied for juices, charcuteries, and others. Among legal definitions, those found in detail – that seem to better define artisanal products – are those from the Autonomous Region of Galicia, in Spain, and Belgium. Briefly, in Galicia (2020,

²⁰ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Sérgio.

art.3º, paragraph a)²¹, artisan food production is defined as

[...] the activity of producing, as well as the handling and processing of food products that [...] are subjected to certain conditions – throughout the entire production process – which guarantees to consumers an environmentally friendly end-product that is unique and safe from a health and hygiene perspective of quality, and with differentiated characteristics thanks to small-scale production overseen personally by the artisan [...] (our translation)

and shall cover companies with less than 10 employees with a turnover less than €2 000 000, sold directly to end consumers, or on the local market, by way of a single intermediary (European Commission, 2018). In Belgium, the artisanal product should at least rely on one of the following elements: i) the nature or quality of the ingredients/components and, in particular, the main ingredients/components or characteristics of the final product. The ingredients or a substantial part of the ingredients should have intrinsic qualities; ii) they should be the result of a manufacturing process, transformation, repair, or restoration, whose activities present essentially manual aspects, an authentic character, developing a certain know-how centered on quality, tradition, creation, or innovation; iii) they should be manufactured on a small or even very small scale (SPF Économie, 2017). The confusion of concepts may be due to the fact that artisanal foods are usually discussed within traditional foods context. Thus, the question “are traditional foods equal to artisanal foods?” is at least an important issue to be discussed further, considering a wider spectrum of foods than those produced only in traditional/cultural ways.

²¹ Decreto 174/2019, de 19 de diciembre, por el que se regula la artesanía alimentaria. Artículo 3. Definiciones [...] a) Artesanía alimentaria: es la actividad de elaboración, manipulación y transformación de productos alimentarios que, cumpliendo los requisitos que establece la normativa vigente, están sujetos a unas condiciones durante todo su proceso productivo que, siendo respetuosas con el medio ambiente, garanticen a las personas consumidoras un producto final individualizado, seguro desde el punto de vista higiénico-sanitario, de calidad y con características diferenciales, obtenido gracias a las pequeñas producciones controladas por la intervención personal de la artesana o artesano.

Petrucio (legalized cheese producer) claimed for a wider range of products to be able to use the ARTE seal onto their label.

Petrucio, cheesemaker: “I think yoghurt and Portuguese *ambrosia* [a dessert made of cooked acid curdled milk and sugar] should get into the ARTE seal too (verbal information)²².”

In fact, in 2022, Brazilian government regulated the ARTE seal for dairy products, as well as products from meat, fish, and bee (Brasil, 2022b).

In relation to the ARTE seal, two interviewed cheese producers had the government authorization to use it. The only disadvantage cited by them was related to the little production of milk during winter, which does not allow them to supply the new market that they achieved with the seal.

Petrucio, cheesemaker: “The disadvantage is that during the winter there is not much production. Now I have 2 cows only, and others are lactating (verbal information verbal)²³.”

Sérgio, cheesemaker: “Customers ask a lot for the seal (verbal information verbal)²⁴.”

In southern Brazil, the production of *serrano* cheese utilizes milk from free-range cows, raised on large ranches and fed primarily on the native pastures, especially during spring and summer, when grass is green and rich in nutrients, thus, there is little milk production in the winter and autumn (Cruz & Menasche, 2014).

Producers that do not have the permission to use the seal said that the main reason to get it would be to enter new markets. Also, to differentiate their products in supermarkets' shelves is an important factor:

Luiza, cheesemaker: “It is important to differentiate from industrial (verbal information)²⁵.”

²² Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Petrucio.

²³ Verbal information related to the ARTE seal provided to authors by cheesemaker Petrucio.

²⁴ Verbal information related to the ARTE seal provided to authors by cheesemaker Sérgio.

²⁵ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Luiza.

Fernanda, cheesemaker: “Differential for small producers and bring trust to our customers (verbal information)²⁶.”

In this context, Jad’ud’ová et al. (2022) observed that regional products labeling can be a tool to add value them, and that it brings trust to consumers regarding the food safety and its higher quality. And in this context, consumers also value the ARTE seal.

However, none of the consumers have seen the seal on food label. Two volunteers said that they saw it on a research survey only. Nelson and Vicente, however, brought important information about the ARTE seal (Figure 1).

Nelson, consumer: “This seal does not remind me of cheeses; it reminds me of an artistic issue (verbal information)²⁷.”

Vicente, consumer: “I agree with Nelson, it does not bring to us any food aspect (verbal information)²⁸.”

When asked if they would pay a higher price for products with it, those from metropolitan and countryside areas said yes, mainly due to the guarantee that the product would present an important added value.

Elizabete, consumer: “The seal gives you an extra second. And the producer earns the added value. With the origin identified, it has the greatest added value. I would pay more to try it out and to have something different. The issue is also to value the small producer and pay more for a handmade product is usual (verbal information)²⁹.”

Paola, consumer: “Since now I live abroad, in the south region, I do not have access to the producer, and I am not confident of the origin of the cheese. So, with the seal, I would buy it, I would try it because I would have the

assurance that the product is hygienic (verbal information)³⁰.”

Márcia, consumer: “I would buy it, especially since it is handmade. Even more so with the seal that gives the guarantee, which is something that will not hurt you (verbal information)³¹.”

Otieno & Nyikal (2017) found that consumers are willing to pay a premium price for craft juices that do not contain additives, thus recognizing the food’s naturalness as a key attribute of product craftsmanship. Also, Cruz & Menasche (2014) observed that *serrano* cheeses are above any suspicion regarding food poisoning risks. However, Ambrosini et al. (2020) evaluated the opinion of consumers of *colonial* cheeses and observed that the sanitary inspection seal is important to a significant share of them, although cultural, sensorial, and production aspects showed also a high relevance for purchasing the product. In this context, the creation of a trademark or logos for artisanal products would help craftsmen and vendors to be recognizable, giving them a strong differentiating element in the market (Rivaroli et al., 2020). It is important to point out that volunteers were not aware about the ARTE seal, which is a quite new approach in Brazil. Knowledge and familiarity of label elements may help consumers to further develop different attitudes, facilitating behavior and possibly even the formation of habits. The findings suggest that ARTE seal may be less relevant in short circuits, where there are closer relations among consumers and producers. Differently, in contexts where consumers and producers do not have closer relations, the seal may have a more important role in the valorization of these products.

In this sense, food policies should be careful, so that actions linked to the appreciation of artisanal products do not conflict with small producers and lead to the segmentation of the

²⁶ Verbal information provided to authors by cheesemaker Fernanda.

²⁷ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Nelson.

²⁸ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Vicente.

²⁹ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Elizabete.

³⁰ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Paola.

³¹ Verbal information provided to authors by consumer Márcia.

appeal to companies with greater investment capacity only. This is in line with a sustainable global food system proposed by Connolly et al. (2022), who claimed a call to action to reorient policies targeting small food businesses to move beyond the concept of firms as profit-maximizing companies, in order to small food businesses operate to promote diversity, resilience, and sustainability in the food system. Vitrolles (2011) observed that the potential geographical indication rules for *serrano* cheese would exclude small cheesemakers, in contrast to the main goal of the action that would be to promote and preserve local history and culinary heritage. Quinn & Seaman (2019) also observed in the United Kingdom that small business support focused on families in a high-growth business, effectively de-prioritizing artisanal food producers.

CONCLUSIONS

Producers and consumers perceived artisan foods as resulting of small-scale production, handicraft, and freshness, with minimum presence of machineries and absence of chemical agents. Also, it is important to highlight the affective memories for the perception of what is an artisanal product. Specifically for cheesemakers, artisanal cheeses must be produced with unpasteurized milk. Consumers disclosed the intention of pay a premium price for food products that present artisan seals on front-package-label, mainly due to the guarantee of acquiring a quality product, through relationships of trust and reputation although the current Brazilian artisanal seal was not familiar to them.

The present study also allows to bring a major discussion about the confusion of concepts of artisanal and traditional foods, which may imply important issues for public policies in the field.

Among the limitations, the present work used a qualitative approach and consequently

a convenience sampling, which is not representative for the Brazilian consumers and artisanal cheese producers.

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