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LABELING OF SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

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Current commercial practices involve operating with various marketing strategies aiming at the interested promotion of products by producers using labels with the appellations "ecofriendly", "eco", "bio", "biodegradable", "organic", "green", "ecological", "natural". The extension of their use is based exclusively on commercial principles determining the adoption of the European directive with reference to the necessity of proof of conformity and justification of sustainable labels.

The study presents the results of research on viable sustainable labels and the possibilities of their use, as well as their meanings.

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Key words: sustainable labels, marking, requirements, ecological mark

INTRODUCTION

The multitude of sustainable labels existing on the market make it difficult for users to choose and opt for sustainable products. It is complicated to have credibility in their action as long as the sustainable labels are very much becoming an element of the trends more than it would ensure the confidence that they are what they promote on the labels. Being sustainable on the label is a trend, a marketing strategy that works, with users having the culture of attention to these sensitive aspects in the aspiration to be more careful in relation to what they consume. The extent of greenwashing by which brands appear to be more sustainable than they really are has led to the approval of the new product labeling strategy.

THE NEW EU REQUIREMENTS IMPOSED ON LABELING

The new European directives approved on January 17, 2024 regarding the labeling of sustainable products prohibit the use of misleading statements with reference to the environment and denote the use of sustainable labels only if they are officially certified or approved by local authorities with the following specifications:

- claims based on emission compensation schemes, such as that a product has a neutral, reduced or positive impact on the environment, are no longer allowed.



- unsubstantiated durability claims, exhortations to replace consumables earlier than strictly necessary and presenting goods as repairable when they are not are prohibited.
 - manufacturers need to focus more on the durability of their goods. Warranty information should be more visible on products, on a new, harmonized label, which would allow products with a longer warranty to stand out.
- An authentic bio, eco or organic product cannot be trusted only if there are references to this on the packaging or in the name of the product. It is essential that it bears the "organic product" logo.



Fig. 1. The ecological logo of the European Union [1]

Products with this logo must be officially certified by a recognized agency. In order to obtain the right to use the ecological logo, the products must comply with rigorous requirements throughout the production of these products, during storage and delivery. In terms of content, products containing at least 95% of organic ingredients can be certified. The rest of up to 5% must comply with specific conditions. Both small and large manufacturers can obtain this certification either nationally or internationally. Using the terms eco, bio or organic without proper certification is illegal.

In addition to the logo, the code number of the control body must also be visible on the packaging, as well as information about the origin of the agricultural raw materials used in the product. Without these elements, a product cannot be considered truly organic, eco or organic, even if the description or trade name suggests otherwise.

The presence of the ecological logo on the label without indicating the control code and the area of origin induces the interpretation that the product does not meet the standards to be labeled as bio, organic or ecological.

The EU Ecolabel cannot be used for certain types of products and services. These include products that have less than 95% organic ingredients. Certain products such as seeds, grains, vegetables, fruit, dairy, meat, fish, wine and certain wild-harvested plants can be certified as organic.

ECOLOGICAL LABELING IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The Republic of Moldova has its own ecological labeling system in accordance with EU requirements.

The groups of products that can be labeled ecologically according to EU regulations are those of:

- cleaning;



- clothing and textiles;
- covering;
- do it yourself;
- electronic equipment;
- furniture and mattresses;
- gardening;
- holiday accommodation;
- lubricants;
- paper;
- personal and animal care products.

The registered national ecological label (fig. 2) was part of the set of actions for the harmonization of national environmental legislation, being developed the Guide: The Ecological Labeling System in the Republic of Moldova and the Regulation on Ecological Labeling, within the "European Union for the Environment" project (EU4Environment). The Ecolabelling Regulation entered into force in April 2024 [2].



Fig. 2. The ecological label of the Republic of Moldova [2]

In the Republic of Moldova, 151 active agricultural producers hold ECO certificates for about 101 agricultural crops and 72 ecological products [2, 3].

Two companies authorized to inspect and certify eco products have been accredited, noting that for the time being, only export-oriented products of vegetable origin are certified: cereals, vegetables, fruits, apples, nuts and wines (fig. 3). None of the animal products was certified [3].



Fig. 3. The label for ecology agricultural products from the Republic of Moldova [3]



There are companies specialized in making quality products from natural and quality raw materials, they do not have products certified, but use labels, logos of their own design on the packaging that suggest that the product is made from quality raw materials (fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Sustainable logos [3]

Producers from fields other than agriculture do not hold such certificates. One of the reasons justifying this moment is due to the fact that the materials used to make a wide range of goods are imported into the country, the economic premises causing the delay in certification.

CONCLUSIONS

The new European regulations with reference to the labeling of sustainable products secure the market of products that are truly responsive to the requirements with reference to ecology.

The verification of the products by the authorized institutions will increase the credibility of the users in the quality of the products and their value. In the same sense, consumers will be given the opportunity to make their own choices and to be in a healthy competitiveness on the national, European and global market.

Sustainable labels will make a clear and obvious distinction between quality products made from raw materials of natural origin in relation to those from mixes and additions.

The market will offer consumers the opportunity to increase the offers in choosing products with an impact on the quality of life and long-term health.

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