

# ETHICAL REGULATION OF FOOD PRODUCTION AND MARKETING AS ONE OF THE CHALLENGES FOR THE EDUCATION OF AGRICULTURAL AND AGRI-FOOD EXPERTS

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## ABSTRACT

*The quality and quantity of food to ensure the quality of life of the population is primarily the responsibility of entrepreneurs engaged in agriculture, agri-food and business. In their activities, entrepreneurs should also employ ethics, which, as one of the regulatory mechanisms, should regulate the production and sale of food to improve the quality of life of the population while respecting the requirement of sustainability. First, an argument is made for the need for ethical regulation of agricultural business and agri-food industry in Slovakia based on a qualitative analysis of theoretical sources in the field of ethics, applied ethics, sociology and other social sciences and humanities, and using knowledge from the field of economics and management of agriculture and food industry. Given the lack of ethics programmes in these areas of the economy to fulfil this role, the need to implement ethics and applied ethics in the education of professionals for these areas of the economy is explained, with the aim to provide safe and quality food to the population and thus a better quality of life.*

**Keywords:** agriculture, agri-food education, ethics, moral competences, moral profile, institutionalizing ethics

**JEL Classification:** : Q13, J24

## ABSTRAKT

*Za kvalitu a množstvo potravín pre kvalitný život obyvateľstva sú zodpovedné predovšetkým podnikateľské subjekty zaoberajúce sa poľnohospodárstvom, agropotravinárstvom či obchodným podnikaním. Na tieto činnosti by sa mali pripravovať aj pomocou etiky, ktorá ako jeden z regulačných mechanizmov by mala regulovať výrobu a predaj potravín s cieľom zlepšiť kvalitu života obyvateľstva a zároveň rešpektovať požiadavku udržateľnosti. Na základe kvalitatívnej analýzy teoretických zdrojov z oblasti etiky, aplikovanej etiky, sociológie a niektorých ďalších sociálnych a humanitných vied, ale aj vďaka poznatkom z oblasti ekonomiky a manažmentu poľnohospodárstva a potravinárstva je najprv zdôvodnená potreba etickej regulácie podnikania v poľnohospodárstve a agropotravinárstve na Slovensku. Vzhľadom na nedostatok etických programov v týchto oblastiach hospodárstva, ktoré by plnili túto úlohu, je zdôvodnená potreba implementovať etiku a aplikovanú etiku do edukácie odborníkov pre uvedené oblasti hospodárstva. S cieľom zabezpečiť bezpečnú a kvalitnú výživu obyvateľom, a tak kvalitnejší život.*

**Kľúčové slová:** poľnohospodárstvo, agropotravinárske vzdelávanie, etika, morálne kompetencie, morálny profil, inštitucionalizácia etiky

**JEL classification:** : Q13, J24

## INTRODUCTION

Ensuring proper and healthy nutrition of the population is one of the basic requirements of any economically and culturally advanced society. Even in the 21st century, it is not guaranteed that the inhabitants of our world have safe, healthy and high-quality nutrition. Not all of them have access to safe and healthy food that would satisfy all their vital functions, enable them to lead a quality life and, at the same time, prevent some of the diseases that would be caused by poor nutrition.

There are several reasons why some populations are not able to benefit from a healthy diet, which is intended to ensure the normal functioning of the body in adults and normal physical and mental development in children. Some societies have considerable problems in ensuring sufficient, safe and good quality food production for their populations. Food is not equally distributed around the world (the so-called food problem), but the reasons for poor human nutrition include the consumption of poor quality and unhealthy food, poor eating habits, etc., which can be linked to the development of a consumption and consumer culture that is driven primarily by economic logic.

The problem of production, distribution and marketing of food has been an issue in every era, but it is particularly acute today, when the free movement of goods brings with it the risk of the uncontrolled spread of any products, including poor-quality and unsafe goods. The responsibility for unsafe and poor-quality food also falls heavily on the shoulders of businesses and their employees in individual countries. Some of them, consciously or unconsciously, prioritize profit in the production, distribution and sale of food over fulfilling their task of providing consumers (clients, customers) with quality products that will satisfy their needs in the long term and ensure healthy nutrition and development.

In order to make the production and sale of safe and healthy food the norm in today's societies, there is a need to regulate the production and marketing of food through ethical standards, along with other measures (political decisions, legal regulation, etc.). This obviously implies, among other things, improving the training of future professionals for the production, distribution and marketing of food, which can be achieved, among other things, by means of ethics.

In order to effectively avoid the production and sale of unsafe and unhealthy food, our effort is to justify the need for the implementation of ethics, and certain types of applied ethics, in the education of future experts in production, marketing and business, especially in the fields of agriculture and agri-food. We consider this as one of the ways to promote ethical regulation of food production, marketing and sales. The knowledge that students will gain through such a change or innovation in the curricula of secondary schools and in the curricula of higher education institutions will enable them to fulfil their individual professional roles more responsibly in various business entities in the above-mentioned areas of the economy to benefit consumers, i.e. all people in society.

## **I** ETHICAL REGULATION OF THE PRODUCTION AND SALE OF FOOD TO ENSURE FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY

One of the problems in today's consumer society, which is also critically addressed by ethics, is the promotion of economic growth and thus consumption, which raises, among other things, the question of how to ensure human life and development in such a society through the safe and healthy nutrition of the popu-

lation. Despite the wide range of food<sup>1</sup> on the market, some food does not meet the requirements of food law, within the EU (*European Union, 2002*), and also the ethical requirements for quality and safety. Food quality and safety are priorities for ensuring the health of the population and for gaining consumer confidence.

We incline to the view of *K. Kopeck*, who states that there is zero risk of compromising quality and safety in food production. However, it is possible to limit and minimize it legislatively by meeting ethical requirements. As he states: “The consumer demands a commitment to quality from the whole food chain (grower – breeder – post-harvest centres – processing industry – hypermarkets – retailers). It is no longer enough to follow the law to gain a reputation, but ethical commitments are increasingly being demanded for food in particular” (*Kopeck, 2015*).

Poor-quality and unhealthy food is, for example, food produced from poor-quality ingredients, using poor technological processes, food that is stored and distributed incorrectly (e.g. food that is incorrectly labelled when sold), etc.

It is important to realize that the problems associated with the production, distribution and marketing of food are not only the concern of professionals in the agri-sector or in the food industry or in agri-sector services, but also of politicians, sociologists, ethicists, etc. In particular, the accumulation of food scandals (sprinkling salt instead of table salt in food from Poland, *listeria* contaminated products from the German meat producer Wilke, the Czech alcohol scandal, excessive amounts of pesticides with significant toxic properties in vegetables, etc.) have contributed to the increased interest in the consideration of ethics in connection with the production and marketing of food all over the world. They revealed some of the problems and risks associated with the production, sale and consumption of food regarding the health of the population and the environment.

However, the production, sale and, in particular, consumption of food can also be compromised as a result of wrong policy decisions. We currently have a problem with cheap Ukrainian wheat in Slovakia, but also in some neighbouring

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<sup>1</sup> Food means substances or products intended for human consumption, or which are reasonably expected to be consumed by humans, including beverages, chewing gums, all substances, including drinking water, which are intentionally added to food during its production, preparation or processing, additives intended for sale to consumers and food for particular nutritional purposes, including dietetic food for special medical purposes provided by specific regulation (*Slov-Lex, 1995*).

countries. Due to the presence of pesticides, heavy metals and other substances harmful to health in wheat of Ukrainian origin, Slovakia has introduced controls on the import of this wheat. From an ethical point of view, it has reacted correctly; the political solution to the problem should definitely consider the safety of citizens, and the state should guarantee them access to quality food. Although the import of wheat from Ukraine can be considered as a friendly gesture towards this state, which is facing war with Russia, this gesture may have negative consequences for the health and nutrition of the population. In addition, the government has banned the import of certain other selected agricultural products and foodstuffs from Ukraine and originating from Ukraine from 19 April 2023 (*see more in Ministerstvo pôdohospodárstva a rozvoja vidieka SR, 2023*).

In any case, we must agree that there are also some poor-quality and even unsafe foods on our market, which not only undermine the confidence of consumers and the public in food producers and sellers, but also endanger the reputation of some businesses and threaten competition (unfair competition). Above all, however, they endanger and harm people's health. *J. Golian* even states that the lack of ethics of producers makes food a weapon (*Polnoinfo.sk, 2012*). He considers the current legislation on food hygiene and safety to be sufficient, but the problem, according to him, is that producers often do not comply with the legislation. He believes that new food related cases show that there is a lack of ethics on the part of producers.

*F. W. A. Brom (2002)* sees the main problem in the fact that in the global market for food and other agricultural products the distance between the consumer and the farmer has increased. This is alienating business participants and causing a reduction in consumer confidence in food safety. But this is just one of the reasons why it is becoming an increasingly urgent challenge in agriculture, agri-food and food marketing to ensure safe and quality food production.

Food safety and quality are two basic requirements that food must meet. Food safety<sup>2</sup> is mandatory, covering the production and storage of food as well as its handling in a way that prevents illness from food, and is defined by official national and supranational institutions. It is important to recognize that harmful che-

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to food safety, food security is considered to have a broader meaning, encompassing food sufficiency (the existence of a sufficient supply) and food affordability.

micals in the soil and food or in the air are the main causes of current diseases of civilization. Thus, food safety policy aims to ensure the free movement of safe and healthy food, a high level of health and consumer protection, and at the same time to unify the requirements for the production and marketing of food (*Ellefson and Zach, 2013*).

However, quality enforcement does not have a clear definition; it is a less exact concept, a more subjective and relative term. Quality consists of sensory and analytical characteristics, as well as maintaining chemical, physical and microbial standards. It is possible to define a framework of objective criteria to distinguish quality food from lesser quality food (for more details see *Centrum rozvoja znalostí o potravinách n. o., n.d.*). In the EU, food quality is associated with the region of origin or traditional recipes (or both). The quality systems applied in each country also have their own criteria. Not all safe food can be considered to be of good quality either, as even prolonged consumption of officially safe but poor-quality food can be risky. This is one of the reasons for ethical regulation of food production and sales.

In food safety research, experts in different fields (e.g. food safety, nutrition, food processing) are involved, and different stakeholders (e.g. consumers, food companies, public authorities, researchers) are jointly consulting. “In bottom-up hazard control performed by food companies and top-down hazard control performed by food safety authorities, there is a common responsibility and interest in preventing public health problems related to the food chain and a common investment in the food chain safety” (*Thomopoulos et al., 2022, p. 2*).<sup>3</sup>

The main task of the ethical regulation of human action is to promote the development of individual’s own powers and abilities in such a way that the possibility of equal development of all other human individuals is respected. But this is certainly not possible through unhealthy and improper nutrition, which threatens further development of an individual and has a negative impact on the sustainability of life.

We assume that both in production and marketing it is important to understand first the goal or purpose of doing business in agriculture and agri-food, which is the same as in other forms of business – to make a profit based on meeting the needs of people. Business entities are interested in achieving such a goal with the

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<sup>3</sup> For more details see more in *Thomopoulos et al., 2022*.

least possible cost and often using limited resources (natural, material, financial, human, information). However, they should not ignore ethical requirements.

Ethical criteria in food production are customer-oriented (quality and health safety of food, safe production technologies). We incline to the opinion that “Health and convenience are mega-trends on today’s European food markets” (*Horská and Sparke, 2007, p. 350*). One product group that reflects both are functional foods.<sup>4</sup> These food products offer an additional health-related benefit next to their nutritional value (*Horská and Sparke, 2007*). Not only the functional food category, but basically all foods must meet the requirement for a healthy diet, i.e. as a minimum they should not harm people’s health. As already mentioned above, even the existing legislation (*Slov-Lex, 1995*) is currently unable to fully prevent poor-quality food from appearing on our shelves.

Also, *Kopec* emphasizes that the ethical requirements relate to the food chain workers (respect for human rights, safe working environment, health care, opportunity for qualification growth, social justice, fair reward), the market (fair market rules, respect for contracts and agreements), the environment (protection from pollution, care for biodiversity) and the global sustainable development of production (*Kopec, 2015*). Like all activities in the economy, activities in the above-mentioned areas of business cannot only be the subject to efficiency or profitability requirements, but must also meet other value criteria. Professionals in these fields have the responsibility of nourishing people; their role is to provide them with food and nutrition – probably the most fundamental need for every person’s life, as it enables them to survive, to ensure physical and mental health and consequently healthy development.

In our society, moral regulation is not yet considered to be a very effective regulatory mechanism, but some stakeholders in advanced societies, including some business stakeholders, are able to assess its importance. They keep in mind that “economy is a means to human ends, not an end in itself” (*Nussbaum, 2010, p. 10*). However, morality in business has gradually become the focus of several areas of applied ethics, especially business ethics, managerial ethics, marketing ethics, but also environmental ethics and agricultural ethics.

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<sup>4</sup> Functional foods are processed foods having disease-preventing and/or health-promoting benefits in addition to their nutritive value (*Arihara, 2014*).

At the end of the 20th century, systematic thinking about the values and norms associated with the food system, agriculture, resource management, as well as food processing, distribution, trade and consumption came to be referred to as agricultural ethics. “Agricultural ethics incorporates elements of philosophical ethical analysis with concerns about particular issue areas that arise in connection with the food system” (*Burkhardt et al., 2005, p. 1*).

Agricultural ethics, but also some other types of applied ethics, are concerned with morality in agriculture and agri-food, and are intended to fulfil several functions, including regulatory. If we think “ethically” but also “economically”, the benefit of such regulation is that it reduces the number of misleading and cheating practices and, most importantly, improves the quality of people’s nutrition and thus their quality of life. Last but not least, respect for ethical standards improves the image, as well as the “reputation” of a given business entity on the market, in society and in the eyes of the public, which gives it a certain competitive advantage.

We can agree that “ethical issues have always been important in agriculture. Agricultural ethics includes elements of philosophical ethical analysis with an interest in specific problem areas that arise in the context of the food system” (*Burkhardt et al., 2005, p. 1*). However, as is also stated, it must be said that ethics has not always had an explicit place in the structure of organizations dealing with agricultural management, decision-making, education and research (*Burkhardt et al., 2005*).

In this respect, the institutionalization of ethics appears to be an appropriate solution in the business of agriculture and agri-food. In this way, ethics can be made a natural part of the corporate culture. Ethics programmes do not provide specific how-to instructions to professionals, and ultimately to all members of the enterprise, company, etc. in these sectors, but use moral standards to draw attention to ethical values and to guide the activities of the business entity (enterprise, company, etc.) internally and externally in accordance with them.

“The most direct strategy for institutionalizing ethics is for everyone in the food system to begin to include some consideration of ethics in the actions, decisions, and policies they create or support. This strategy means that farmers, scientists, research administrators, regulators, and decision makers at the highest

levels routinely would reflect on the ethical rightness or wrongness of their own actions and decisions, as well as those of others; engage in debate as appropriate; and, ultimately, try to act ethically” (*Burkhardt et al., 2005, p. 9*).

Some businesses in developed countries have already decided to institutionalize ethics in their organization and thus promote moral orientation and moral decision-making among their employees. They are setting up *ethics programmes*<sup>5</sup> to improve performance, productivity, reduce risks and costs through moral standards. Their role is also to eliminate unethical behaviour of employees, strengthen the reputation and goodwill of the company, increase international recognition, etc.<sup>6</sup> Their main mission is to prevent unethical profit making in business, help organizations solve problem situations, promote ethical self-reflection among employees, etc. For example, *M. Kaptein (2015)* but similarly *N. S. Majluf and C. M. Navarrete (2011)* consider ethics programmes as a formal system of control in organizations. By monitoring behaviour and controlling how ethical standards are followed in the company, they should aim to eliminate unethical behaviour and generally promote ethical business.

The establishment of a code of ethics, or the introduction of any ethical programme into business organizations, shows that they consider ethics to be an important part of their corporate culture. Unfortunately, in Slovakia (for example compared to the USA) we do not often encounter ethical programmes in business, and the problem is that their compliance is not monitored. For example, one of the ethical programmes is the code of ethics, whose role is to regulate behaviour in accordance with accepted ethical standards, whereas we believe that the nature of many ethical codes is largely declarative. Organizations are mainly concerned with the visibility of their own value preferences; codes of ethics are a set of moral requirements, norms, principles, and there is often no feedback on the extent to which they are considered in practice, thus to what extent they are effective.

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<sup>5</sup> The basic forms of institutionalization of ethics in companies or ethics programs in companies and other types of organizations are ethics codes, ethics leitmotif, ethics ombudsperson, ethics commission, ethics roundtables, ethics seminar, ethics workshop, ethics hotlines, ethics audit, etc. (*for more details see e.g. Remišová, 2011; Navrátilová, 2018 et al.*).

<sup>6</sup> Processed according to *Johnson and Abramov, 2004*

But the problem is that in Slovakia, ethics programmes in these areas of the economy are rare or too sporadic. This can be attributed to the fact that business entities are not sufficiently aware of their tasks or do not have the necessary skills to develop them.

We can only find, for example, an older code of ethics – *the Code of Ethics of LESY SR* (2004), the Belgian Code of Ethics (2014),<sup>7</sup> which is published on its website by the Slovak Chamber of Agriculture and Food, *the Code of Ethics of the Slovak Association of Plant Protection*, or *the Code of Ethics of the Soil Consultant*, or the so-called *Professional and Ethical Code of the Nutritional Consultant*. In addition, some enterprises, companies, and other organizations have developed their own codes of ethics in the above-mentioned areas of the economy. These include, for example, Hamé (business name: Orkla Foods Slovensko s.r.o.), Agrofert, a.s. etc.

One of the reasons why individual entities do not seek to regulate food production and marketing, and ultimately the entire business process, through codes of ethics and other ethical programmes may be the lack of knowledge about ethics and the absence of moral competencies among the professionals in a given organization. Therefore, we believe that one of the other solutions to regulate the production and marketing of food and ultimately the overall business of agriculture and agri-food, through ethical standards, is a higher quality education of agricultural and agri-food professionals, which would include knowledge of ethics and applied ethics.

## 2 METHODS

The training of future agricultural and agri-food professionals through ethics is one of the challenges for the education of professionals in the fields of agriculture and agri-food. We assume that in order to ensure the quality of life of the population, it is important to ensure safe and healthy nutrition of the population, which requires, among other things, ethical regulation of food production. The production and sale of safe and quality food is unfortunately not the norm. This is confirmed, in particular, by the accumulation of food related scandals (sprinkling salt instead of table salt in food from Poland, *listeria* contaminated products from

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<sup>7</sup> For more details see *LESY SR, 2004; SPPK, 2014*

the German meat producer Wilke, the Czech alcohol scandal, excessive amounts of pesticides with significant toxic properties in vegetables, etc.). They revealed some of the problems and risks associated with the production, sale and consumption of food in relation to the health of the population and the environment.

Our effort is to react to these problems and to propose a change in the education of future professionals in the fields of agriculture and agri-food in order to address them and, if possible, to prevent them from occurring in the future. In this way, we believe that the production and sale of poor-quality and unsafe food can be avoided to some extent, so that the trust of consumers and the general public in food producers and sellers is not undermined, the reputation of certain businesses is not jeopardized and competition is not threatened (unfair competition). Most importantly, human health must not be harmed or put at risk.

In our opinion, the problems associated with the production, distribution and marketing of food should not only be dealt with by experts in agriculture or the food industry or in agri-services, but also by politicians, sociologists, educators, ethicists, etc., all of whom should bear in mind that food safety and quality are two of the basic requirements that food must meet in order to ensure a healthy nutrition for the population. In view of these requirements, it is also necessary to address the ethical regulation of food production, marketing, and sales, which implies some changes or innovations in the education of future experts in these areas of the economy.

In the context of the need for ethical regulation of activities in these areas of the economy, we will look at the problem of the institutionalization of ethics in agriculture and agri-food, and precisely in this context we will draw attention to the need to improve the training of future professionals in these fields, also through ethics. We assume that the implementation of ethics in the education of future experts is an important prerequisite for the formation of their moral profile, which is related to the creation of codes of ethics and other ethical programmes in organizations in the above-mentioned areas of the economy, through which the ethical regulation of activities in individual organizations is implemented.

However, the main focus is on the acquiring of moral competences and overall – on the formation of the moral profile of these experts by means of ethics and applied ethics. The development of codes of ethics and other ethical programmes,

which should, among other things, regulate the production and sale of safe and quality food, also presupposes the acquirement of some knowledge of ethics and, in particular, of applied ethics. In this context, we introduce ethics and the main types of applied ethics and justify the need to include them in the education of future graduates of those secondary schools and universities that focus on the training of professionals for the fields of agriculture and food.

### 3 IMPLEMENTATION OF ETHICS IN THE EDUCATION OF FUTURE EXPERTS IN AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD FOR THE PURPOSE OF ETHICAL REGULATION OF FOOD PRODUCTION AND MARKETING

In the context of the need to regulate activities and processes in the aforementioned areas of the economy using ethics, we have outlined the problems with the institutionalization of ethics in organizations. In our opinion, these are largely related to the insufficient training of professionals who should be involved in their development, implementation and control, among other things. In this context, attention should be paid to the education of future professionals who will be involved in the production and marketing of food. Together with ethics, future experts should also learn about some other humanities and social sciences in the education process.<sup>8</sup> We agree that an education model that disregards the arts and humanities can be dangerous, reducing the quality of life for all of us and also the health of our democracies.

By implementing ethics as a human science in education, experts in all areas of the economy, and therefore also in agriculture and agri-food, can acquire the moral competences that should be part of professional competences.

Moral competences are considered to be the capacity of individuals to reach moral judgments based on their internal principles and then to act in accordance

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<sup>8</sup> In this regard, we incline to *M. C. Nussbaum*, who in her book *Not for Profit* rejects the idea that education is primarily a tool for economic growth. She argues that “economic” thinking and decisions do not always lead to a better quality of life. “With the rush to profitability in the global market, values precious for the future of democracy, especially in an era of religious and economic anxiety, are in danger of getting lost” (2010. p. 6).

with them (*Lind and Nowak, 2004*). Moral competences are considered by *D. Melé*, in the context of managerial ethics, who pays particular attention to character and virtues in leadership (for more details see *Melé, 2012a*). According to him, moral competences in leadership are nothing more than moral virtues<sup>9</sup>, which encourage people's trust and willingness to follow the leader. They include, for example, justice, honesty, persistence, generosity, humility (*Melé, 2012b*).

We agree that in the management profession, these competences or virtues are important prerequisites for managers to make fair, responsible, honest and similar decisions in specific situations. *Melé* considers the key moral competence for leadership to be the moral competence of *willingness to serve*. This is the willingness to serve others, in the sense of unselfishness and self-sacrifice. As he states, developing a willingness to serve requires sensitivity to the authentic needs and legitimate expectations of the people around, considering their well-being, professional and human development (*Melé, 2012a*). We suggest that moral competences, among other competences, are important, not only for managers but also for other employees in agriculture and agri-food.

Another moral competence, *responsibility*, is also considered, along with *justice*<sup>10</sup>, as a moral principle, and also as a moral virtue. Responsibility applies not only to the performance of tasks within a given job, but to all initiatives that concern people, as well as nature and the environment. According to *R. Kolářský (2011)*, people cannot fulfil their moral obligations to others and to themselves without behaving responsibly towards the Earth's nature. Similarly, *A. Schweitzer* states that "Ethics is a responsibility towards all living beings extended in such a way that it does not end anywhere" (*Schweitzer, 1986, p. 354*). According to him, we should show equal respect to every life. It is the respect for life that must lead us to take responsibility for our actions, to be aware of our own choices and to justify the necessity of this action considering the consequences (for more details see *Schweitzer, 1986*).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Moral virtue is a certain gained (developed) and stable disposition of a member of the human species or a character trait of an individual that allows them to act morally right (*Kuna, 2010*).

<sup>10</sup> The virtue ethicists consider justice to be a supreme moral virtue and justify this by arguing that, in the absence of universally accepted and superior principles of justice, people acting based on various and contradictory ideals of life would constantly come into conflict (see more in *Palovičová, 2003*).

<sup>11</sup> In addition to *A. Schweitzer* see e.g., *Skolimovski, 1996; Leopold, 1999; Jonas, 1997; Mravcová, 2020; and others*.

On the basis of justice, these experts should act justly, while the question is whether the just character of individuals is a sufficient condition to ensure social order. Certainly, justice presupposes a politically and legally organized social life, but at the same time it is necessary to realize that its creators are human beings. It is therefore desirable that justice is part of their moral profile.

Furthermore, moral competences include, for example, moral sensitivity, which can be understood as a way of interpreting a situation, accepting roles and also the ability to have empathy with the actor (*Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2013*). Also on this basis, professionals should recognize, for example, the potential consequences of individual decisions and actions for other people (e.g. damage to health, reputation, etc.) and take into account moral values in their decision-making.

Moral competences, as well as other competences, are acquired during lifetime, some of them through education in schools, through ethics and applied ethics, but also, for example, from sociology, psychology, etc. Nevertheless, their formation is influenced by the activity and effort of each person to acquire them. The question arises, however, as to what extent, if at all, these disciplines are represented in education in schools that train professionals in the agricultural and food sector. We have already outlined above some of the main reasons for implementing ethics and, in particular, applied ethics in the teaching and curricula of schools training agricultural and agri-food professionals. For example, the concept of corporate social responsibility,<sup>12</sup> one of the fundamental concerns of *business ethics*, encourages professionals in these areas of the economy to be responsible towards consumers and customers, but also towards market partners, competitors and the community, as well as to the nature and the environment. In addition to the standard topics covered in applied ethics, regarding the training of professionals in these areas of the economy, attention is drawn to respect for moral standards in the planning and implementation of the production of food for the population, feed for livestock, and by-products for the food and light industries. The knowledge gained from applied ethics encourages them, for example, to give preference to organic production instead of intensive industrial

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<sup>12</sup> The concept of corporate social responsibility is characterized by three pillars: economic, social and environmental (*for more details see e.g. Crane et al., 2008*).

agriculture, which is friendlier to human health, nature and the environment. By avoiding fertilizers, pesticides, stimulants, antibiotics and genetically modified organisms, such production has a much more positive impact on improving the quality of life.

Not only business ethics but also some other types of applied ethics encourage future experts in agriculture and agri-food to minimize damage to nature and the environment in the very establishment of production, the location of production units, but especially in the use of all material and energy inputs for manufacturing and in the process of production. For example, by taking care to recycle as much as possible, returning materials and energy to natural cycles, sensibly handling non-recyclable waste, etc., the material needs of both customers and final consumers can be met in this way. *Environmental ethics*, *ecological ethics*, but also *bioethics*, *economic ethics*, etc. can also contribute to this, assuming that future professionals are familiar with them. These types of applied ethics will enable them to be aware that the strategy of economic reproduction is beginning to threaten the reproduction of natural ecosystems, and that human-made wealth is associated with the devastation of nature's wealth. Consequently, this should motivate them to protect nature and the environment, which have not only utilitarian but also existential value for people.

Another applied ethics aspect that cannot be overlooked with regard to shaping the moral competences of professionals in agriculture and agri-food, especially those involved in the process management in them, is *managerial ethics*. It is one of the types of professional ethics, it defines the moral requirements for the profession of managers and sets the ethical standard in general as well as with respect to specific managerial specializations. Also referred to as management ethics, it justifies the need for humane management and the values that should be accepted by every performer of this profession, provides them with models of behaviour, etc. (for more details see *Bednár, 2019; Dytrt and Němec, 2018*; and others).

Specifically, we would like to point out that the training of future experts who will deal with the marketing of agri-food commodities of agricultural primary production enterprises, as well as the marketing of the food processing industry, should also include knowledge of *marketing ethics*. The inclusion of this applied ethics in the training of these experts could also to some extent prevent various

unethical practices in advertising, promotion, etc., from appearing so frequently on the market.

Marketing is described as a social and managerial process in which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through the production and exchange of products and values (*Kotler and Armstrong, 1992*). Its basic characteristic is customer orientation in an attempt to influence the demand for products, while the aim of marketing is to satisfy customer needs and achieve market advantage. In the fulfilment of these objectives, we observe a number of morally questionable situations, mainly in the effort to maximize profit. Collectively, this involves manipulating customers and consumers, undermining fair competition and damaging nature and the environment.

There are special impulses for marketing ethics in the global market environment, where unethical marketing is linked to the emergence of multinational corporations, the expansion of brands,<sup>13</sup> the expansion of some retail chains in a globalized world, and thus the threat of choice, the overflowing multinational concerns, etc. Unethical marketing is also applied in the market for counterfeits (imitations). The OECD has long monitored the trade in counterfeit products and a document dealing with this trade states that the most commonly traded food products are fats/oils, fish/fish products, fruit and vegetables, but also dairy products, meat/meat products, honey, alcoholic beverages and cigarettes.<sup>14</sup> They are usually more affordable for the population, but both safety and quality are an issue. Marketing ethics also draws attention to this, but above all it helps to resolve the moral dilemmas concerning the sale of counterfeit products, as neither the safety nor the quality of these products is guaranteed.

Moral problems in marketing in the above-mentioned areas of the economy appear already in market research, but especially in communication in product development, pricing and distribution. It is therefore not enough for entities involved in marketing simply to respect the rights of consumers as defined by the Consumer Protection Act (*Slov-Lex, 2007; Slov-Lex, 2001; and others*). They should also respect the moral requirements relating to attitudes towards con-

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<sup>13</sup> Regarding the fact that the quality of products is often ignored, while the emphasis is on the brand and about other unethical practices of the advertising industry, see *Kleinová, 2005*.

<sup>14</sup> See more in *Stránský, 2021*.

sumers, but also towards the state, competition and the promotion of pointless consumption, which promotes a consumer culture, etc. Marketing ethics points out that all marketers are responsible for choosing which people's needs are to be met, with what priority and also with what products, with a view to developing their quality of life. We are convinced that, by familiarizing themselves with it, professionals can avoid some unethical and controversial marketing strategies (planned outdated production, pyramid schemes, subliminal advertising, etc.) as well as other unethical practices that harm consumers. misleading advertising, misleading pricing, inadequate or incorrect labelling of products, fictitious price discounts or fictitious opportunities to win, the possibility of returning purchased goods, etc.), but also practices that harm other business participants, society, the environment and nature as a whole.

For example, unethical advertising can encourage people to waste food (e.g. to buy short shelf-life food without consideration, to buy poor-quality food, etc.). For example, in some companies wishing to establish themselves in the market through advertising and/or public relations, we encounter the so-called "greenwashing".<sup>15</sup> Such companies declare that they are acting in an environmentally friendly way, despite the fact that their results show the opposite. This should not be the case especially in functional foods, which are specifically designed to promote health.

Even though advertising is regulated by the Act on Advertising, which requires that advertising should not be disseminated in violation of good morals and also regulates the environmental aspects of advertising, we continue to see unethical advertising that negatively influences consumer behaviour. For example, as was revealed in relation to the impact of advertising on purchase decision-making through a survey focused on the perception of food advertising by Slovak consumers, the majority of replies are dominated by statements of a negative nature, namely that advertising encourages unnecessary consumption and manipulates people (*Ábelová and Kádeková, 2011*).

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<sup>15</sup> Regarding greenwashing, several techniques are used. These include wrong direction (emphasizing philanthropic actions in an attempt to divert attention away from problematic environmental/social goals when, for example, employees have much worse working conditions than companies declare.) For more details on other techniques, see, e.g., *Jones, 2015*.

The role of marketing ethics is to apply moral requirements to the decision-making of marketing managers and basically to all their activities (market research, pricing, distribution, etc.). They also have a responsibility for the quality of the products on the market and are expected to promote the sale of products that are safe and healthy and whose packaging contains true information on ingredients, dates of manufacture, consumption, etc. They also have a responsibility not to promote self-interested consumption for the purposes of profit. This would require excessive and at the same time unnecessary use and damage to natural resources (particularly flora and fauna) or excessive use of non-biotic components of the environment and, last but not least, it would contribute to the development of consumerism and consumer culture. On the contrary, marketing ethics should encourage them to consume responsibly and in a sustainable way (e.g. green purchasing...).

Together with the above-mentioned types of applied ethics, some other types of applied ethics could also participate in the formation of the moral competences of professionals in agriculture and agri-food and, in general, in the formation of their ethical profile. The problem is not only the low trust of the population in ethical regulation, but also the lack of space in the curricula of schools, the lack of willingness on the part of the school authorities to include ethics in the curricula, etc. In this context, there is a need to educate both future and current professionals at least by means of courses in ethics and applied ethics or by other irregular forms of education.

## CONCLUSION

Among the problems, or even threats, that concern people living in today's societies is the consumption, including the consumption of food that does not meet the necessary safety and quality requirements. Therefore, all steps that lead to the protection of healthy and safe food production are welcome. One of these is the regulation of food production and marketing through ethical standards. Although many agricultural and food professionals do not yet consider such regulation of activities to be effective, it has nevertheless been our effort to justify the need for it. We referred to the servility of both sectors of the economy in relation to the population, which must have access to safe and healthy food.

In this context, we first drew attention to ethical programmes, and in particular to codes of ethics. They represent an effort to institutionalize ethics in all areas of the economy, although in comparison with abroad they have not yet been sufficiently established in our country in agriculture and food processing, but also in other areas of the economy. One of the reasons for this is that we do not yet seem to have enough professionals who are aware of the need for ethical regulation of activities in agriculture and agri-food. At the same time, most of them do not have the necessary skills, especially moral skills, which are a prerequisite to participate in the development of codes of ethics, other ethical programmes as well as skills for the implementation of all professional activities in accordance with ethical standards.

In this context, and in general in connection with the implementation of all activities in the above-mentioned areas of the economy, we have come to the conclusion that it would be appropriate to implement ethics and, in particular, some types of applied ethics in the training of professionals for the above-mentioned areas of the economy. This would enable them not only to view individual tasks, goals and ways of their implementation in terms of good and evil, consider ethical values in their decision-making, but also form moral competences that would become a necessary part of their moral as well as professional profile.

Together with the knowledge that the future professionals would acquire in their education through vocational subjects, ethics can help them produce and place on the market safe and quality food. The implementation of ethics, and in particular some types of applied ethics, in the educational process will help professionals in these business areas respect ethics as a regulatory mechanism in the production, sale and consumption of food so that the quality of life of the population is improved while respecting the requirement of sustainability. At the same time, the knowledge gained in ethics and applied ethics can significantly help them develop some ethical programmes for organizations, including codes of ethics. Also, by using them they will be able to produce safe and quality food that will enable businesses to make a profit and gain a competitive advantage in the market and at the same time provide healthy food for the people, which is an important prerequisite for a good life. However, all of this presupposes curricula innovation in secondary schools and also in higher education.

Finally, we would like to add that knowledge of ethics can be a valuable contribution for policy makers in the development of food safety policies at national and international level.

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