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Article

Artisanal Cheeses: A Qualitative Approach Towards Brazilian Cheesemakers' and Consumers' Concepts and Perceptions about Artisan Foods

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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 the consumers. Cheeses are important food models to evaluate consumers' and producers' perception about artisanal foods worldwide. Thus, the objective of the present study was to evaluate the perception of consumers and cheesemakers towards artisan foods, focusing on artisanal cheeses. For this purpose, two focus group were performed either with cheese producers and with consumers to discuss the topic. Colonial and Serrano cheeses, traditional and cultural dairy products in Brazil, were used as food model for the discussion. Producers and consumers related artisan foods to small scale of production, handicraft and freshness. Affective memories were also an important issue related to artisanal cheeses. For cheesemakers, artisan cheeses must be produced with unpasteurized milk, which was not cited by consumers. 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. The confusion about artisanal and traditional food concepts were observed, which is a subject to be deeply evaluated further. The findings provide useful implications to policy makers and institutions that can influence citizens' attitudes and consumption patterns of artisanal products.

Keywords: handicraft; craft; Serrano cheese; Colonial cheese; focus group; perception

1. Introduction

Cheeses are dairies consumed worldwide, and innumerable types are considered traditional and cultural foods. Brazilian artisanal cheeses have historical, socioeconomic and environmental importance, since they are typically produced by small cheese makers, characterized by small scale production, following traditional techniques proper from each region (Kimimura et al., 2019) and some (such as the Serrano cheese) shall be produced with cattle fed with native pasture, reducing the impact of implantation of monoculture within the region and its negative impacts (Ambrosini et al., 2012; Krone and Menasche, 2019; Ceolin et al., 2020). Canastra, Minas, Serro, Cerrado and Araxá cheeses are typically product in the Southeast Brazil; Marajó cheese, in the North; Butter and Curd cheeses in the Northeast; Caipira cheese in the Central; meanwhile Colonial and Serrano chesses are traditional dairies in Southern Brazil (Kimimura et al., 2019). Most of producers commercialize the dairy products as complement family incoming, and thus carried out informally, without sanitary inspection (Cruz and Menasche, 2014; Kimimura et al., 2019; Steinbach et al., 2021). Thus, traditional cheeses in Brazil are usually produced in a homemade or handcraft way.

In the past decades, the demand for artisanal, handcraft, homemade foods presented a huge growth, being global handicrafts market size to reach US\$ 48,165 million in 2020 and is expected to grow 8.41% during 2022-2027, reaching market size close to US\$ 1.2 billion (Business Research

Insights, 2022). This phenomenon is possible highly related to the “quality turn” debate (Goodman, 2003; Goodman et al., 2012) in which cultural, social, environmental, territorial aspects, and 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 (e.g., 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).

Currently, there is no single definition or international harmonization of norms regarding artisan food (Rivaroli et al., 2020; Lingham and Manning, 2022). European Union’s countries have established guidelines on the use of the term “artisanal”, identifying as criteria for labelling foods as “artisanal” such as the nature or quality of the ingredients, the production process, and the production at a small scale (Italy, 2016; SPF Economie, 2017; European Comission, 2018). In United States of America and Asia, there is no formal definition of “craft” or “artisanal” (Kasapila and Shaarani, 2011; Ravioli et al., 2020). In Brazil, the law 13,680 from June 2018 established the concept of artisanal foods (Brazil, 2018) and the law number 11,099 from June 2022 regulated the production and commercialization of food products of animal origin produced artisanally (Brazil, 2022a). It is important to point out that the law only provides the concept for foods of animal origin and defines them as “food products of animal origin produced by artisanal way - 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, resulting from predominantly manual techniques adopted by individuals who hold the integral control of the production process, whose final manufacturing product is individualized and genuine and maintains the uniqueness and the product’s own, cultural, regional or traditional characteristics”. The creation of a trademark or logos for artisanal products would help craftsmen and vendors to be recognizable and giving them a strong differentiating element on the market (Rivaroli et al., 2020). In Brazil, actually, those enterprises that follow the requisites (Brazil, 2019) are able to use the ARTE seal (Figure 1) onto their products’ label.



Figure 1. ARTE seal according to Brazil (2019).

Artisanal cheeses present their own logo (Brazil, 2022b) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. ARTE seal for cheeses according to Brazil (2022b).

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

Consumers' behavior and attitudes towards foods are extremely complex objects of study (Poulain and 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, as economics, epidemiology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, nutrition, history and technological disciplines, among others (Poulain and Proença, 2003; Goulart et al., 2020).

Focus groups are qualitative methodologies that able a deeper understanding of views in a collective, taking account of the fact that attitudes are not developed in isolation (Morse and Field, 1996). By letting participants verbalize their opinions, qualitative research allows researchers to grab detailed information about the respondent's perception, also understanding the bias he/she provided in his response, and also to check for gaps in the questions/answers that can be addressed immediately. Within a focus group technique, it is also interesting that the participants can interact with each other, with collective perceptions on the subject, increasing the diversity of responses and perceptions. This methodology has been widely used to study food topics and their consumers with important contributions to the food field (Ribeiro et al., 2018; Happer and Wellesley, 2019; Carolan, 2021, Myrnes-Hansen and Skeiseid, 2022).

Within these contexts, the present work aims to evaluate the perception of consumers and cheesemakers of Serrano and Colonial cheeses in Brazil regarding to artisanal cheeses. Also, perception and behavior towards 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 is also performed in order to contribute to the complex area of the subject studied.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Volunteers 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 the Agricultural Municipal Secretaries. Recruitment of consumers took place using social

media advertising targeting cheese consumers older than 18 years old. 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 was asked to schedule the meeting.

Among consumers, 101 people answered to the online survey and for the focus group meeting 4 individuals from metropolitan region of Rio Grande do Sul and 5 who lives 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. Table 1 shows their profile, whose names were substituted to pseudonymous in order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents.

Table 1. Consumers profile.

Pseudonymous	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

For the recruitment of cheesemakers, 5 registered in the municipal sanitary inspection agencies answered and participated. Within cheesemakers who produce and commercialize cheeses informally, 3 answered the invitation. Among type of cheese produced, 2 cheesemakers produced Serrano in the countryside region cheese and had sanitary inspection regulations and the ARTE seal; and 6 Colonial cheese, being one in the metropolitan region and 5 in the countryside, being half without sanitary inspection and none with the ARTE seal. Table 2 shows their profile. The criterium for the recruitment was also the willingness to participate in the focus group and the availability of time for the meeting.

Table 2. Cheesemaker profile.

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

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

2.2. Focus group dynamics

The focus group happened online via Google Meet platform and took between 40 minutes and 75 minutes 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 State University of Rio Grande do Sul Ethical Committee (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 involved previously in the project. Consumers were asked about their perception about artisanal foods concept; what is the main motivation to purchase an artisanal cheese; what do they observe onto cheese label. Participants were shown the seal and asked if they had seen it before, what it reminds 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.

Complete survey routine is presented in Supplementary Material A and is presented in English and Portuguese to full understanding.

2.3. Data analysis

Hypotheses, method and analytic plan were specified prior to data collection. The discussion material was transcribed and analyzed by triangulation process (Minayo, 2010), where two researchers independently watched focus groups and noted the answers for the question in the survey and personal comments. A third researcher 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.

3. Results and Discussion

People's perception about artisanal foods presents a huge spectrum and analyzing them is important to proper definition in 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 expressed by Petrucio:

Petrucio, cheesemaker: "It is small production; own production, family production"

On this basis, the cheesemakers Luiza and Maria contributed with 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; 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'"

Maria, cheesemaker: "For me, it is related to quantity and 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, used little equipment and does not use additives or preservatives"

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"

Marta, cheesemaker: "Me too. It is a handmade product, with nothing from the factory"

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

The same perception concept was observed into 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"

Elizabete, consumer: "Artisanal cheese is that produced on a small scale on small properties. You don't use all that industrial dairy machinery. More selectivity then."

The small-scale production aspect has not received a lot of consideration currently in scientific literature and there is a lack on deeper discussion about the issue towards artisanal concept (Rivaroli et al., 2020). Abouab and Gomez (2015) reported that the higher human contact for food production,

higher consumer credence of product craftsmanship and naturalness because human processes are perceived as being more respectful of food integrity. Moreover, 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 additionally to the importance to support provided to local economies (Autio et al., 2013). Fonte (2008) also considers that reducing the distance between producers and consumers, has benefits for natural resources, attention to cultural and biological diversity, 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 did present no label or official seals, even on consumers' who lives in metropolitan regions. This fact may be seen on Nelson and Vicente speech:

Nelson, consumer: "Colonial cheeses often has no label"

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"

Pereira et al. (2023) 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 to knowing the product and believed in the seller. Also, Cruz and Menasche (2014) observed that consumers, producers and traders of Serrano cheeses emphasized the importance of buying cheese from someone they know, which is closely related to the cheese production in small family farms and the short-chain commercialization of artisanal products. Lahne and Trubek (2014) suggested that consumers combine information about producer practice, social context, and the materiality of the product through an active, learned practice of sensory perception.

In line to valorization holistically the quality of foods, quality is now also associated not with that based on industrial systems concepts, but 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 (Cruz and Schneider, 2010; Cruz and Menasche, 2014; Goodmann, 2017; Ambrosini et al., 2020). Also, valorization 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, 2017) that overlap the industry standard is correlated to trust based on networks of interpersonal relationships (Granovetter, 2007) that are embedded in the producers' tradition of know-how. 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 were discussed the concept of artisanal foods: affective memory and freshness:

Luiza, cheesemaker: "It is rescue flavors"

Joselita, cheesemaker: "Homemade cheese in the kitchen. Cheese made from raw milk. and it's pure"

Candice, cheesemaker: "Also, it is freshly made, fresh cheese: take the milk and curdle it"

Marta, cheesemaker: "For me it is homemade without any preservatives"

Cláudia, consumer: "It must have no preservative like in dairy industry"

Paola, consumer: "For sure it is without any preservatives"

Marinete, consumer: "In addition to everything they said, it has to do with the affection and the whim that people do"

Naturalness has been pointed out as an important perception about artisanal foods, since they are recognized as more respectful of food integrity and nature, with 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, in 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 perception 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 remind to childhood memories (Menasche, 2009). Fonte (2008) considers that 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 lives in the metropolitan region:

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"

Vicente, consumer: "I have lived my whole life in the capital, but my grandparents are from the countryside and made cheese. My stepfather has a sale and buys cheese from the countryside to sell here. So we have a lot of habit of consuming colonial cheese"

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

Paola, consumer: "*Since now I live in São Paulo, eating colonial cheese for me is like drinking chimarrão*" (authors: chimarrão is a traditional hot beverage made with yerba-mate (*Ilex paraguariensis*)).

The importance given to this characteristic denotes that human food seeks more than the satisfaction of physiological needs, being a source of health, but also of well-being and is associated with moments of pleasure. In addition to biological and nutritional aspects, humans are feed on imaginary and meanings (Fischler, 1979). Also, since acceptance and purchase intention of food is a complex phenomenon and non-sensory 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., 2023).

Such as claimed above and highlighted 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, own milk"

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

At this point is important to highlight that these answers were given in the discussion about the concept of artisanal foods, which brings important information that these non-tangible attributes are essential to further artisanal and handcraft projects' frameworks. Within these contexts, an important discussion herein is the misalignment of the concept of artisanal foods, which seems to be mixture to the traditional food concept. The European Union 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. The author also defines that traditional foods are products with qualitative characteristics, being linked to aspects of cultural identity, to a territory and that must be part of a range of traditions that must necessarily ensure their continuity over time. Guerrero et al. (2009) observed that, based on consumers perception, traditional foods are consumed every day or quite frequently by people, being

part of everyday life and commonly used, or associated with specific celebrations and/or seasons, usually passed down from generation to generation, made from precise way, according to the gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing, handling distinguished and known for its sensory properties and associated with a particular area, region or local country. Consumers associate traditional foods with the habit. These references show similar profile to most described in the present work either by producer or consumers. Even in Brazilian regulation of artisanal cheeses (Brazil, 2019) the concept of traditional shows up: 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 in detail found that seems to better define artisanal products are those from the autonomous region of Galicia in Spain and Belgian. Briefly, in Galicia, artisan food production is defined as “is the activity of producing as well as handling and processing food products that are subject to conditions throughout the entire production process that guarantee consumers an end-product that is environmentally friendly, unique, safe from a health and hygiene perspective, of quality and with differentiated characteristics thanks to small-scale production overseen personally by the artisan” and shall cover enterprises 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 Belgian, the artisanal product must at least rely on one of the 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 must have intrinsic qualities; *ii*) must be the result of a manufacturing process, transformation, repair or restoration whose activities present aspects essentially manual, an authentic character, developing a certain know-how centered on quality, tradition, creation or innovation; *iii*) manufacturing on a small or even very small scale (SPF Economie, 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, not only those produced in traditional/cultural ways.

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

Petrucio, cheesemaker: *“I think yoghurt and ambrosia (authors: a desert made of cooked acid curdle milk and sugar) should get into the ARTE seal too”*

In fact, in 2022 the Brazilian government regulated the ARTE seal for dairy, meat, fish, bee products (Brazil, 2022c).

In relation to the ARTE seal, two cheese producers interviewed had the government authorization to use it. The only disadvantage cited by them was related to the little production of the dairy during the 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”*

Sérgio, cheesemaker: *“Customers ask a lot for the seal”*

In Southern Brazil, production of Serrano cheese uses milk from free-range cows, raised on large ranches and fed primarily on the native pastures, especially in spring and summer when the grass is green and rich in nutrient, and thus there is little milk production in winter and autumn (Cruz and 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"

Fernanda, cheesemaker: "Differential for small producers and bring trust to our customers"

In this context, Jad'ud'ová et al. (2022) observed that regional product labeling to be a tool to add value to producers' product and that it brings trust to consumers that the food is safe and with higher quality. And in this context, consumers also value the ARTE seal.

Among consumers, none of them have seen the seal on food label. Two volunteers said that 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 cheeses; it reminds me an artistic issue"

Vicente, consumer: "I agree with Nelson, it does not bring to us any food aspect"

When they were asked if would pay a higher price for products with it, those from metropolitan and countryside 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"

Paola, consumer: "Since now I live abroad 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*"

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"

Otieno and Nyikal (2017) found that consumers are willing to pay a premium price for craft juices that do not contain additives, thus recognizing in the food's naturalness a key attribute of product craftsmanship. Also, Cruz and Menasche (2014) observed that Serrano cheeses are above any suspicion regarding food poisoning risks. However, Ambrosini et al. (2020) evaluating colonial cheeses' consumers observed that the sanitary inspection seal is important to a significant share of them, although cultural, sensorial and production aspects also presented high relevance to purchasing the product. In this context, the creation of a trademark or logos for artisanal products would help craftsmen and vendors to be recognizable and giving them a strong differentiating element on the market (Rivaroli et al., 2020). It is important to point out that volunteers were not aware about the ARTE seal, which is quite new approach in Brazil. Knowledge and familiarity to labels elements may help consumers to further develop different attitudes, facilitating behavior and possibly even the formation of habits. The findings suggest 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 must 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 appeal to companies with greater investment capacity only. This is in line to 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 enterprises, 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 and Seaman (2019) also observed in United Kingdom that small business support focused on families in a high-growth business, effectively deprioritizing artisanal food producers.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, producers and consumers perceived artisan foods to small scale of production, handicraft and freshness, with minimum presence of machineries and absence of chemical agents. Also, it is important for the artisanal perception the affective memories. Specifically for cheesemakers, artisan 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 on 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. However, it allowed the present work to reach important and deep information about the main topic, which would be difficult to get in quantitative surveys and thus this inability could not negate the intrinsic value of this work and the important information for to governments' agencies to further food policies.

Ethics approval statement: The experimental procedure was approved by the Ethics Committee of the State University of Rio Grande do Sul (Certificate of Presentation of Ethical Appreciation number 58043722.2.0000.8091) *in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki*.

Data availability statement: Not applicable.

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