

# ASPECTS OF THE INNOVATIVE ACTIVITY OF TRADITIONAL FOOD MANUFACTURERS AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE EXAMPLE OF THE WARMIŃSKO-MAZURSKIE VOIVODESHIP

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**Abstract.** Research on the innovation activities of enterprises in Poland are carried out in different directions, but there is little information from the traditional food sector. Given the growing consumer interest in traditional food and the importance of innovation to gain a competitive edge in the market it is important to know the circumstances of the situation. Consequently, in 2016 research was conducted using qualitative research methods – Individual Depth Interview. The aim of the study was to determine the level of innovation and the innovative activity of companies from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship producing traditional products entered in the List of Traditional Products. The scale of innovation activities of enterprises, its barriers and stimulants, and the needs and expectations of entrepreneurs in supporting innovative activities were analyzed.

**Keywords:** innovation, traditional food, producers, qualitative research

## INTRODUCTION

The Polish sector of traditional food products is characterized by a high number of micro- and small enterprises. Driven by the progressing globalization and other factors, the increased competition makes it significantly harder for the operators to adjust their activity to the varying market conditions, and to survive their fight

with large companies (Banterle et al., 2009). In turn, market opportunities for traditional food manufacturers are determined by the varying behaviors of consumers interested in high-quality foods. In this context, despite an apparent contradiction between innovation and tradition, a need emerges for introducing novel products and processes in the sector of traditional foods, too (De Jong and Marsili, 2006). The skillful implementation of innovations is a strategic tool for companies who want to maintain their competitive edge (Laforet and Tann, 2006). Nonetheless, traditional food manufacturers have a limited capability of implementing innovations, including without limitation novel products. The main reasons include the unavailability of financial resources or specific features of a food product. Usually, micro-enterprises do not have enough capital to perform onsite R&D works. At the same time, the traditional characteristics of food products make it difficult to implement innovative ideas, and therefore any innovative actions are a serious challenge in this case (Gellynck and Kühne, 2008).

While both the European and domestic legal acts make references to “traditional foods,” some differences exist between them. As defined by the European Commission, traditional foods mean food products that have been traded for at least 25 years (Rozporządzenie..., 2006). This definition covers various categories of food

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products with attributes stemming from traditional characteristics of raw materials and production methods as well as from their national, regional or local place of origin. The sector of traditional food products is strictly linked with specific geographic areas, and therefore has a significant impact on the local economy. In Poland, traditional food products additionally include those entered to the List of Traditional Food Products (LTFP).

Until now, only a few studies have addressed innovations in the traditional foods sector (Gellynck and Kühne, 2008; Gellynck et al., 2011; Guerrero et al., 2009; Kühne et al., 2010). In this sector, innovations should focus on reinforcing and extending the relevant market while taking into consideration such emerging problems as fake products or varying nutritional attitudes of the population, shifting towards more processed, ready-to-eat food products (Trichopoulou et al., 2006). The understanding of the perception, expectations and behaviors of consumers in respect to traditional food products is indispensable for the effective implementation of innovations in this area. Consumer surveys prior to the introduction of innovations may be very useful, having in mind that the perception of both the innovation and the potential risk by consumers and experts may vary (Verbeke et al., 2007). In addition, controversies between innovation and traditional aspects, when combined together, may give rise to concerns among consumers.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Having regard to studies carried out by other authors, this survey of innovative activity of traditional food manufacturers, as illustrated by the example of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship, is not limited to focusing on the innovative character of the products, but addresses the concept of innovation on an extensive basis. Enterprises who implement innovative solutions invest in products and processes, and search for new markets or innovative distribution channels for their products (Banterle et al., 2009). Considering the above, the purpose of this study was to discover the status of innovations and the determinants of innovative activities taken by manufacturers of food products entered to the List of Traditional Food Products of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship.

The subject matter of this study was a group of enterprises who operate in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship and manufacture food products entered to the List of Traditional Food Products (purposive sampling). In 2016, the LTFP from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship included 27 items. Actually, these were 13 food products manufactured by 10 operators, each of them offering at least one registered traditional food product.

The study was divided into several stages. The first one was the analysis of secondary reference materials addressing the innovative nature of micro- and small-scale manufacturers of traditional food products. The second stage involved the identification of research problems and related research objectives, whereas the third stage included field studies based on qualitative surveys, i.e. individual depth interviews (IDI). In this method, the interviewer and the respondent engage into a conversation to collect detailed information on the subject matter of the study without any third-party interference.

The respondents were employed in enterprises from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship active in the manufacturing of food products included in the LTFPs. These were persons with a higher or secondary level of education who managed or owned the enterprises under consideration. At the qualification stage, the issues to be discussed and the expected duration of the interview (30–60 minutes) were communicated to the respondents. Before the interview, a researcher called the respondents to establish a meeting date convenient for both parties. The interviews were conducted in the offices of the enterprise in a casual atmosphere, based on the same scenario. The assumption of each interview was to gather explanations of the motives for the respondents' engagement in innovative activities. The study was conducted in August and September 2016.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Characteristics of manufacturers of traditional food products in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship

Warmia and Mazury is a region characterized by strong traditions in food production that reinforce the potential of this sector. Food processing is primarily based on local raw materials grown in the unpolluted natural environment. In addition, the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship reports one of the country's lowest use

levels of mineral fertilizers. The “Strategy for the socio-economic development of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship by 2025” classifies high-quality food products, including traditional ones, into the so-called smart specializations. Approximately 5,400 enterprises covered by the high-quality food products specialization are registered in this voivodeship, representing 4% of all local business operators (a leading position in Poland). Enterprises with this specialization have an approximate share of 21% in total sales revenues of enterprises active in the voivodeship, thus confirming the significant role of this specialization in the local economy. Companies engaged in this specialization include both recognized market players and individual manufacturers with a small export and investment potential. This reflects the considerable diversity of demand for innovations (Żywność..., 2015). Only the manufacturers of products covered by List of Traditional Food products were selected for further analysis (Table 1).

The survey sample was diversified in terms of institutional and legal forms of enterprises (Table 1). The largest group of respondents were representatives of micro- and small-scale enterprises running their business as a family company. The second largest group was composed of operators engaged in honey production: apiary farms and a beekeepers association. The high share of honeys in the group of traditional Warmia and Mazury food products may be due to the natural values of the environment in a region which demonstrates relatively low pollution levels. Also, the survey sample included a dairy cooperative and an agri-tourism farm. Apart from honey producers, the group was composed of representatives of dairy, bakery and confectionery, meat, and fish sectors, and beverage producers. Hence, the group was dominated by operators who preferred working on their own rather than joining any organized collaborative associations. None of the respondents was affiliated with a foreign partner, which is indicative of the local nature of their activity.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of manufacturers of traditional food products in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship

**Tabela 1.** Charakterystyka podmiotów wytwarzających żywność tradycyjną w województwie warmińsko-mazurskim

Institutional and legal form Forma instytucjonalno-prawna	Characteristics of the business operator Charakterystyka podmiotu gospodarczego	Products entered to the LTFP Produkty wpisane na Listę Produktów Tradycyjnych
1	2	3
Cooperative	Established in 1906, the Dairy Cooperative manufactures a wide range of dairy products: milk, butter, cottage cheese, sweet whey, and semi-cured cheeses. This includes Welski cheese, a product recognized by the market, that has been manufactured for decades based on the same production technology.	<b>Welski cheese</b> – listed in 2007, category: dairy products
Spółdzielnia	Spółdzielnia Mleczarska istnieje od 1906 r. Jest producentem szerokiej gamy produktów mleczarskich: mleka, masła, twarogów, śmietanki i serów dojrzewających. Rozpoznawalnym produktem na rynku jest ser welski produkowany od dziesiątków lat w niezmiennej technologii produkcji.	<b>Ser welski</b> – wpis uzyskał w 2007 r., kategoria: produkty mleczne
Agricultural farm	The beetroot syrup is manufactured using a traditional method; it may be used for culinary or confectionery purposes. For instance, it may be consumed with bread or pancakes, or used as a cake ingredient that substitutes honey or sugar. Brukowiec mazurski is a cake typical of the Lubawa district due to its unique recipe and baking form. Except for the raising agent and seasonings, it is made entirely with the use of raw materials originating from the manufacturer’s own farm. The manufacturing traditions of Fefernuszki cookies in the region of Łąkorz date back to the end of the 19th century because of the sugar factories operating in this area. Main ingredients of Fefernuszki include the beetroot syrup (used instead of honey or sugar) and flour.	<b>Beetroot syrup</b> – listed in 2006, category: vegetables and fruits <b>Brukowiec mazurski</b> – listed in 2010, category: bakery and confectionery products <b>Fefernuszki</b> – listed in 2012, category: bakery and confectionery products

**Table 1 cont. – Tabela 1 cd.**

1	2	3
Gospodarstwo rolne	Syrop buraczany wytwarzany jest tradycyjną metodą, może służyć do celów kulinarnych bądź cukierniczych np. do spożycia z chlebem, naleśnikami, wypieku ciast – zastępując tym samym miód i cukier, Brukowiec mazurski – ciasto charakterystyczne dla Ziemi Lubawskiej ze względu na recepturę i formę wypieku. Przygotowywany z wyjątkiem środka spulchniającego i przypraw, z produktów własnego gospodarstwa. Fefermuszki – tradycja przygotowywania w okolicach Łąkorza pojawiła się pod koniec XIX wieku i związana była z istniejącymi na tych terenach cukrowniami. Jednym z głównych składników fefermuszków jest słodki syrop buraczany, używany zamiast miodu czy cukru oraz mąka.	<b>Syrop buraczany</b> – wpis uzyskał w 2006 r., kategoria: warzywa i owoce <b>Brukowiec mazurski</b> – wpis uzyskał w 2010 r., kategoria: wyroby piekarnicze i cukiernicze <b>Fefermuszki</b> – wpis uzyskały w 2012 r., kategoria: wyroby piekarnicze i cukiernicze
Natural person engaged in a business	Established in 1992, the family enterprise manufactures cottage and semi-cured cheeses using traditional methods based on raw milk from the owner's own goats and cows. It also includes a restaurant, a farmer shop, a hotel and a farm providing raw materials for the processing plant and catering purposes. Cheese, curdled milk, raw milk and vegetables may be purchased at the farmer shop. The restaurant serves regional cuisine meals prepared with products from the owner's farm.	<b>Curdled milk</b> – listed in 2008, category: dairy products <b>Mleko zsiadłe</b> – wpis uzyskało w 2008 r., kategoria: produkty mleczne
Osoba fizyczna prowadząca działalność gospodarczą	Firma rodzinna działająca od 1992 roku. Wytwarza sery twarogowe i dojrzewające z mleka surowego, pozyskiwanego od własnych kóz i krów. Proces ich wytwarzania odbywa się tradycyjnymi metodami. Posiada też własną restaurację, sklep farmerski i hotel oraz gospodarstwo, które jest naturalnym zapleczem dla przetwórci gastronomii. Sery, mleko zsiadłe i surowe oraz warzywa można kupić w sklepie farmerskim. Restauracja przygotowuje posiłki kuchni regionalnej, głównie z produktów pochodzących z własnego gospodarstwa.	
Natural person engaged in a business	An enterprise with strong apiculture traditions, producer of bee honey mostly from the Warmia and Mazury region. Its standard product range includes polyfloral honey, honeydew, buckwheat, linden, acacia, and heather honey, as well as the awarded natural non-heat-treated meads, honey spirits and liqueurs based on natural ingredients.	<b>Warmińska okowita miodowa</b> – listed in 2013; category: beverages <b>Warmińska okowita miodowa</b> – wpis uzyskała w 2013 r., kategoria: napoje
Osoba fizyczna prowadząca działalność gospodarczą	Firma o wieloletniej tradycji pszczelarskiej, produkuje miody pszczele przede wszystkim z regionu Warmii i Mazur. W stałej ofercie ma m.in. miód wielokwiatowy, spadziowy, gryczany, lipowy, akacjowy, wrzosowy, obsypane nagrodami miody pitne naturalne – niepoddawane obróbce termicznej oraz wódki i miodówki na bazie naturalnych składników.	
Natural person engaged in a business	The idea to establish an enterprise was supported by a family tradition of baking baumkuchen (sękacz). In 1990, the enterprise launched its production based on a traditional recipe. It has gradually moved towards a successful business by continuing its production and improving the baking technology and recipes which enabled extending the product's shelf-life.	<b>Sękacz mazurski</b> – listed in 2006, category: bakery and confectionery products <b>Sękacz mazurski</b> – wpis uzyskał w 2006 r., kategoria: wyroby piekarnicze i cukiernicze
Osoba fizyczna prowadząca działalność gospodarczą	Pomysł na uruchomienie firmy został zaczerpnięty z rodzinnej tradycji pieczenia sękacza. W 1990 r. uruchomiono produkcję opartą na tradycyjnej recepturze. Do sukcesu zakład dochodził powoli, wytwarzając i udoskonalając technologię i recepturę wypieku, co pozwoliło na wydłużenie okresu przydatności do spożycia.	
Agri-tourism farm	The farm was built on the ruins of a burnt-down house. Today, the former barn and piggery have been converted into a living room with a fireplace and into an apartment. All dishes are made of bio-products. The key product is the Dylewska ripening ham (Szynka dylewska dojrzewająca) manufactured by the family for generations. The production cycle includes a year-long seasoning and maturation under a wooden shed.	<b>Dylewska ripening ham</b> – listed in 2010, category: meat products

**Table 1 cont. – Tabela 1 cd.**

1	2	3
Gospodarstwo agroturystyczne	Gospodarstwo powstało w miejscu ruin spaleniska, teraz w dawnej oborze znajduje się salon z kominkiem, a w dawnej chlewni apartament. Wszystkie potrawy są przygotowywane z ekologicznych produktów. Koronny wyrób to Szynka dylewska dojrzewająca, która wytwarzana jest w rodzinie od pokoleń. Szynka powstaje w rocznym procesie leżakowania w przyprawach i dojrzewania pod drewnianą wiatą.	<b>Szynka dylewska dojrzewająca</b> – wpis uzyskała w 2010 r., kategoria: produkty mięsne
Apiary farm	The enterprise is engaged in the production and sale of honey and honeybee products. The beekeeping traditions have been an inherent part of the owner's family history for more than five decades. The enterprise also owns a bio-farm which grows raspberries and sells apiarian equipment.	<b>Lime and polyfloral honey from Barcja</b> – listed in 2012, category: honeys
Gospodarstwo pasieczne	Firma zajmuje się produkcją, sprzedażą miodu i produktów pszczelich. Tradycje, związane z pszczelarstwem, od ponad poł wieku są nierozdzielnie związane z rodziną właścicieli. Firma posiada również gospodarstwo ekologiczne, które zajmuje się uprawą owoców maliny oraz prowadzi sprzedaż sprzętu pszczelarskiego.	<b>Miód lipowy i wielokwiatowy z Barcji</b> – wpis uzyskały w 2012 r., kategoria: miody
Association	An Association of beekeepers from the Gołdap District. Apiary locations include the Romincka Forest, the Borecka Forest and areas protected under the Natura 2000 program. The local honey is of an extraordinary quality because a considerable part of local farms continue to rely on traditional agriculture without chemical spraying or agents that could subsequently become an ingredient of honey.	<b>Mazury Garbate Honey (Miód Mazur Garbatych)</b> – listed in 2010, category: honeys
Stowarzyszenie	Stowarzyszenie jest organizacją zrzeszającą pszczelarzy z terenu powiatu gołdapskiego. Pasieki rozlokowane są między innymi na terenach Puszczy Rominckiej, Puszczy Boreckiej oraz obszarach należących do programu Natura 2000. Miód pozyskiwany w regionie ma szczególną jakość, gdyż duża część miejscowych gospodarstw rolnych prowadzi tradycyjną formę uprawy roli, bez chemicznych oprysków i preparatów mogących znaleźć się w składzie miodu.	<b>Miód Mazur Garbatych</b> – wpis uzyskał w 2010 r., kategoria: miody
Apiary farm	The apiary is a family farm rich in traditions, established in the 1950s and successively extended ever since. Today, it owns several hundred hives. It is located in the picturesque area of Mazury Garbate, in an uncontaminated nature zone. The beekeeping tradition and passion allows the owner to develop this specialization by producing high-quality rapeseed, polyfloral, linden, buckwheat and other honeys.	<b>Olecko District honey (Miody Ziemi Oleckiej)</b> – listed in 2016, category: honeys
Gospodarstwo pasieczne	Pasieka to gospodarstwo rodzinne z tradycjami, założone w latach pięćdziesiątych i systematycznie rozbudowywane, obecnie liczy kilkaset uli. Położone jest na terenie małowniczych Mazur Garbatych, w enklawie nieskażonej przyrody. Dzięki kultywowaniu tradycji i zamiłowania do pszczelarstwa właściciel rozwija tę specjalizację i produkuje miody wysokiej jakości: rzepakowy, wielokwiatowy, lipowy, gryczany i inne.	<b>Miody Ziemi Oleckiej</b> – wpisy uzyskały w 2016 r., kategoria: miody
Natural person engaged in a business	The enterprise includes a fish processing plant, a restaurant and a hotel. Established a few years ago, the plant processes freshwater fish intended for the domestic market and exploits local lake resources. The fish are packed into jars, and the production is a fully manual process—from fish scaling through to the finished product packed in jars.	<b>Pike caviar</b> – listed in 2016, category: fishery products
Osoba fizyczna prowadząca działalność gospodarczą	W skład firmy wchodzi przetwórnia ryb, restauracja i hotel. Przetwórnia ryb działa od kilku lat i przetwarza ryby słodkowodne na potrzeby rynku krajowego, bazując na zasobach lokalnych jezior. Ryby pakowane są do słoików a produkcja odbywa się ręcznie, poczynając od oczyszczenia ryb do wyrobu gotowego zapakowanego w słoiki.	<b>Kawior ze szczupaka</b> – wpis uzyskał w 2016 r., kategoria: produkty rybołówstwa

Source: own elaboration based on studies and promotional materials of analyzed food products.

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badań oraz materiałów promocyjnych analizowanych podmiotów.

### Scale of innovative activities of the surveyed enterprises

The food sector enterprises operating in the Warmia and Mazury region differed in their approach to the innovation. Differences were particularly noticeable between small- and micro-scale operators as well as between medium- and large-scale companies. However, most of the latter were innovation-oriented (Żywność..., 2015). As shown by the results, the innovative activities taken by business operators were very limited. In the traditional food sector, only a few of them completed or continued the relevant initiatives. In the cases under discussion, the development of novel ideas by enterprises often resulted from self-learning processes or, sporadically, from their cooperation with the R&D sector, which remains at a very low level. From the perspective of activities taken by the surveyed enterprises, the main reason behind the need to invent and implement novel solutions was market pressure. However, it was not strong enough to encourage them to undertake innovative actions. This is because of the conviction that high-quality products and the specific nature of the offered product range (traditionally manufactured niche products) play a special role in building the enterprise's market position. These manufacturers believe that their activities based on traditional methods and products are contrary to any innovative concepts.

*In my opinion, the name itself indicates that the traditional product cannot be innovative. A traditional product should be manufactured with traditional methods that have provided the company with a strong market position. (P1)*

In addition, most of the respondents claimed that innovation, research and development are the domains of larger companies and, therefore, they were hardly ever considering these issues in their vision of company development.

*Today, if the company strives to survive on the market, it needs to manage its capital in a very rational way. Thus, I am often forced to abandon my innovative actions. (P2)*

Among all types of innovation, product innovations were prevalent in the surveyed group of enterprises. This type of innovation involves the introduction of novel products and the modification of the existing ones. As emphasized by the manufactures, the small production scale enables a direct relationship with the consumers.

This, in turn, helps interpreting their expectations and predicting their future behaviors on the market.

*Customers expect new releases or at least an alteration of the current offer. A direct relationship with our customers enables better identification of their expectations. (P3)*

For traditional food consumers, product packaging is the most acceptable form of innovation (Guerrero et al., 2009). They claim the change of packaging does not change the basic properties of traditional food products while ensuring the desired benefits, e.g. an extended shelf life (Guerrero et al., 2009). Also accepted are innovations that involve increasing the nutritive value of a food product, which stems from health benefits expected by consumers (Cayot, 2007). Moreover, consumers express their positive attitudes in response to changes making the product more user-friendly, as long as they not result in any significant alternations to the product itself. In contrast, innovations that affect the sensory values of food products are absolutely rejected by consumers (Cayot, 2007). In summary, in the traditional food sector, innovations refer mainly to product innovations, such as modifying the packaging or the product composition, size or way of use (Kühne et al., 2010). Process innovations are less popular because of their effect on product authenticity and manufacturing methods. Potential changes may include improvements to the manufacturing process in order to ensure product quality and traceability. In turn, while marketing and organizational innovations may be equally beneficial to traditional food products, their potential remains unexploited and unnoticed by all users of the traditional food sector (Gellynck and Kühne, 2008).

Also, as confirmed by the results of this study, the surveyed enterprises demonstrate little interest in process innovations. The few examples included energy and raw material savings or accelerating the manufacturing process. A similar opinion was expressed by the respondents as regards marketing innovations which primarily included the development or upgrade of a website.

### Benefits and problems resulting from innovative activities of surveyed enterprises

Benefits of and problems posed by innovative activities of the surveyed enterprises were diversified, and their importance varied from one manufacturer to another. The respondents declared common reasons for

undertaking or abandoning their innovative activities. Some of them claimed that their innovative activities positively affected the growth of their enterprises as they enabled extending the product or service range, as reflected by the increased production capabilities.

*A new product idea followed by the marketing of the product has allowed us to acquire new customers. The entry to the LTFP has additionally strengthened our promotion. (P4)*

The reasons for introducing organizational changes also included the need to compete on the market and the intent to increase profits or reduce costs. Nevertheless, most of the respondents either restrained from introducing innovations or made minimum efforts in this direction. The skeptical approach to innovation resulted primarily from the belief that sufficient demand exists for their products or from the absence of significant outcomes of implemented innovations.

*The specificity of the product and our strong, long-standing market position ensure satisfactory sales levels. Also, with our limited production capacity, we are not motivated to take any additional marketing actions. (P5)*

According to the Oslo Manual (2008), some factors exist that constitute barriers to the development of innovation. This means factors related to costs, knowledge, market, institutions, etc. Also, the surveyed operators faced many problems in their innovative activities. Some of them claimed that the implementation of novel solutions in their regular activity is a prolonged process because of the need to use their own capital, which often is limited.

*It is easier for large companies to implement changes as they have a large financial potential and because the consequences of a failure are not as severe as in the case of enterprises with small capital resources. (P6)*

It is rare for micro-scale enterprises to dispose of financial resources that could be allocated to innovative activities. On the other hand, they lack collaterals that would enable them accessing external funding for these purposes (Steinerowska-Streb, 2014). As a consequence, such enterprises must rely on their own capital to finance innovation (Juchniewicz and Grzybowska, 2010). In most cases, the surveyed enterprises had no dedicated financial units that could apply for the available financial support. In this context, micro-business were definitely more restricted than larger enterprises in their ability to implement innovations (Steinerowska-Streb, 2014).

From the respondents' perspective, the identification of market needs was not a barrier in developing innovative solutions, as most of them claimed to have sufficient knowledge of the market they operate on.

*We are present on a relatively stable local market. Hence, we may easily adjust to it. (P7)*

### **Needs and expectations of entrepreneurs regarding support for innovative actions**

The entrepreneurs emphasized that the reasons behind their disadvantaged market position included the presence of large chain companies (distribution issues) and a strong price competition on the domestic market. They believe a significant role could be played in this respect by governmental organizations that should provide greater support to the manufacture of high-quality food products.

*Products we sell are often of significantly higher quality than those offered in retail networks. However, we need state support to be competitive on the market. (P8)*

In order to effectively compete on the market, and to be able to adopt appropriate strategies, enterprises need to consider the external and internal determinants of their actions. The surveyed operators usually had no organized approach to planning their future steps.

*In today's dynamically changing economy, it is difficult to make far-reaching plans. We are trying to be flexible. (P9)*

Investments are a significant aspect of business development. However, the investment activity of the organizations under consideration was low, mainly focused on marketing novel products and services. Those who decided to invest relied on their own capital as the main source of financing. Only few of them were using EU funds or bank credits. Outlooks for the future were quite similar. Several operators planned to undertake an investment risk in the near future. The most frequently cited investment examples included the purchase of new technological and production equipment, the development of existing production facilities or development of the research activity through measures such as the establishment of an in-house laboratory.

Very few respondents reflected upon implementing novel marketing solutions or reinforcing their position on the domestic and international market through various instruments of company internationalization. Only two of the surveyed organizations were active on

international markets (cooperation with retail networks or distribution directly to the customer). For some of them, internationalization means presence at specific international fairs and exhibitions. Most of the respondents believe that entering the international markets would be an excessive risk.

## CONCLUSIONS

Innovation in the group of traditional foods products has so far been marginalized in scientific research. Undoubtedly, the specific nature of this sector, the way this business is run, and the scope of the manufacturers' activities (usually limited to a specific location or region) prevent them from becoming innovation leaders on the food market. Nonetheless, if they intend to maintain or reinforce their competitive edge, they too need to engage in innovative actions.

The results of this survey allow to formulate a few conclusions. Firstly, it needs to be emphasized that the traditional food business does not facilitate the implementation of innovations. On the one hand, this is hindered by formal reasons (e.g. in the case of process innovations), while on the other hand, innovations in this sector are not much expected, or sometimes even rejected, by the consumers. Also, traditional food enterprises from the Warmia and Mazury region are usually small operators with a limited resource potential and scope of activity. This is another obstacle in implementing the innovations. It is also noteworthy that smaller operators have limited access to external financing for their activity.

The main type of innovative actions taken by the surveyed entities were product innovations. However, their activity in this respect was limited to the release of new (while still traditional) food products in their regular offer. In addition, the producers exhibited some activity in the area of marketing innovations. They found it significant to have a personalized website which also is an online store: one of the ways of extending the geographic scope of sales. Another noticeable discovery is that the surveyed group of enterprises reported virtually no problems with low demand for their products. The reasons were their established market position and, usually, their limited production capacities.

Despite limited levels of innovative activity, representatives of the traditional food sector in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship noticed some positive

effects of such measures. They claimed that their engagement had strengthened their enterprises. In addition, they emphasized that they would expect support from competent state authorities to compete with retail networks. Especially because the consumption of high-quality food products they provide to the market entails multiple social benefits.

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## ASPEKTY DZIAŁALNOŚCI INNOWACYJNEJ PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW WYTWARZAJĄCYCH ŻYWNOŚĆ TRADYCYJNĄ NA PRZYKŁADZIE WOJEWÓDZTWA WARMIŃSKO-MAZURSKIEGO

**Streszczenie.** Badania nad działalnością innowacyjną przedsiębiorstw w Polsce prowadzone są wielokierunkowo, brakuje jednak analiz dotyczących sektora żywności tradycyjnej. Biorąc pod uwagę rosnące zainteresowanie konsumentów żywnością tradycyjną oraz znaczenie innowacji w uzyskaniu przewagi konkurencyjnej na rynku, istotne jest poznanie uwarunkowań tej sytuacji. W związku z powyższym w 2016 roku rozpoczęto realizację badań z wykorzystaniem metody badań jakościowych – indywidualnego wywiadu pogłębionego. Celem badania było określenie stanu innowacyjności oraz uwarunkowań aktywności innowacyjnej przedsiębiorstw z Warmii i Mazur, wytwarzających produkty tradycyjne wpisane na Listę Produktów Tradycyjnych. Przedmiotem analizy była skala działalności innowacyjnej przedsiębiorstw, jej bariery i stimulatory oraz potrzeby i oczekiwania przedsiębiorców w zakresie wspierania działań innowacyjnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** innowacje, żywność tradycyjna, producenci, badania jakościowe

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