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TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA IN THE CONTEXT OF ENSURING FOOD SECURITY

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Abstract: *In the Republic of Armenia, the food industry is considered one of the key sectors of the economy, whose primary objective is to provide citizens with high-quality food products, as food represents a basic necessity, and both its quality and quantity determine people's health and intellectual capacity. In terms of essential food products (such as wheat, vegetable oil, sugar, and certain types of meat products) RA faces issues of self-sufficiency, which are compensated through imports. The food industry addresses food security challenges while simultaneously generating added value and creating new jobs. The food production sector is directly linked to agriculture, whose inherent risks inevitably affect the efficiency of the food industry.*

The efficiency of the food industry also depends on the social status of the population. Due to insufficient financial resources, there is no demand from consumers for safer food.

The development of the food safety sector is one of the key processes within the agrarian policy implemented in the Armenian economy. Its goal is to ensure consumers are provided with high-quality and safe food products and to guarantee food security.

The relevance of this topic is determined by the importance of this issue.

The main objective of the article is to study the current state of the food industry in the Republic of Armenia.

The research was carried out using sectoral study methods, as well as descriptive, analytical, and statistical data analysis approaches.

As a result, practical recommendations are presented, including:

- *Improving sectoral legislation and aligning it with international standards;*
- *Ensuring control at all stages of the food industry;*
- *Implementing a system of continuous professional training for specialists;*
- *Increasing the level of public awareness among the population.*

Keywords: *food security, food industry, self-sufficiency, imports, processing, food safety, yield, soil fertility.*

Introduction

In the Republic of Armenia, the food industry is considered one of the important sectors of the economy, the purpose of which is to provide citizens with high-quality food products, since it is a basic necessity, and people's health and intellectual strength depend on its quality and quantity. In the RA, regarding essential food products such as wheat, vegetable oil, sugar, and certain types of meat products, there is a problem of self-sufficiency, which is compensated through imports of these products. Large quantities of beef, pork, poultry meat, wheat, milk powder, etc. are imported. The food industry solves food security issues while simultaneously ensuring added value and creating new jobs. The food production sector is directly related to the agricultural sector, the inevitable risks of which affect the efficiency of the food industry. Fluctuations in the social condition of the population also affect the consumption of food industry products. The relevance of the topic selection is determined by the importance of this issue.

The main purpose of the article is to study the current state of the food industry in the Republic of Armenia:

- The current state of the food industry and the importance of ensuring safe food supply have been studied,

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- The level of self-sufficiency in food products and food imports in the RA have been studied,
- Based on the comparison of the obtained results, conclusions and recommendations have been provided.

Literature Review

The concept of food security originated in the 1970s and has been constantly evolving since then, reflecting its complexity and the difficulty of implementing it in changing political and operational environments. The concept of food security was first proposed in 1974 at the World Food Summit (WFS) and was defined as “the permanent availability at all times of sufficient supplies of basic foodstuffs to meet the sustainable growth of food consumption and to compensate for fluctuations in production and prices” [4]. According to this definition, food insecurity is caused by a lack of quantitative food resources and high international food prices.

In 1983, the concept of ensuring access to available resources was included in the concept, that is, “paying equal attention to both demand and supply: ensuring that all people have both physical and economic access to essential foodstuffs at all times” [5]. The idea behind this concept was that the determinant of food insecurity was not an inadequate supply of food, but inadequate control over food resources.

In 1996, the concept of food security was included and food security was defined as a situation where people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life [6].

Food insecurity, defined as the lack of access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food at all times for an active and healthy life, affects millions of people worldwide [7,8]. Food security is a holistic system that includes the physical availability of food (agricultural production and market conditions), access to food (economic and physical), stability (price and income shocks), and utilization (food security and nutritional knowledge). While people’s ability to access food is determined by personal income and food prices, food security can deteriorate due to falling income levels, high food prices and/or food supply shocks.

Food insecurity is a major challenge worldwide. Given the importance of reducing food insecurity, many researchers have attempted to identify the main determinants of food security and food insecurity, focusing on the dimensions of food safety, availability, and accessibility.

V. Stany found that the causes of food insecurity are multiple: education, gender, income, food quantity, and it is necessary to encourage large-scale production through new technologies, access to food, education and finance, strengthening the capacities of farmer organizations, diversification of activities, access to resources by women, and development of agricultural markets for products and inputs [9].

N. Aziz examining the macroeconomic determinants of food insecurity in South Asian countries, concluded that increased production increases malnutrition and that national food access is not sufficient to reduce malnutrition unless poor people also have economic and physical access to food [10].

S. Lin emphasize the importance of the environment in addition to economic determinants and propose healthy dietary scenarios for Asian countries of different status, taking into account environmental impact, calorie intake, and income level [11].

Olufemi-Phillips consider the increase in food prices as the main determinant of food insecurity and propose to control prices and provide subsidies to low-income households to mitigate its impact [12].

There is almost no research on econometric estimates of the determinants of calorie insecurity in the case of Armenia. The data are mainly focused on food consumption statistics, such as the daily bread consumption of the population in Armenia. From this perspective, the research presented will provide an opportunity to examine the level of calorie insecurity of the RA population and identify its main determinants.

Methodology

The studies were conducted using methods of sectoral study, descriptive, analytical, and statistical data analysis. As a result, recommendations were presented.

Analysis

The goal of every state is to provide its citizens with high-quality food products, since food is a basic necessity, and people’s health and intellectual strength depend on its quality and quantity. However, for socially vulnerable populations, the importance of quality is often pushed into the background, and the price of the product becomes more important. In such cases, the state must establish control over the food products produced, imported, and sold in the country. Taking into account the importance of all this, the Government of the Republic of Armenia established an approach in the RA Law “On Food Safety [8].” In the Republic of

Armenia, the food industry is considered one of the important sectors of the economy. After independence in the 1990s, when industrial development declined, the pace of development of the food industry began to grow. Table 1 presents the types and quantities of products produced in the RA.

Table 1**Production of Main Products by Types of Economic Activity[9]**

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Meat, 1000 tons	85	85	81	80	87
Sausages and similar meat products, tons	12666	12032	12413	13084	14358
Canned stewed meat, tons	1214	528	1149	815	616
Canned meat with vegetable and mixed vegetable products, tons	1582	197	574	956	617
Fish prepared or preserved by other methods, tons	253	478	257	206	265
Fruit and vegetable juices, 1000 liters	12107	17117	17976	23350	22618
Vegetables preserved for short-term storage, tons	19291	13417	11279	12509	10919
Processed and preserved fruits and nuts, tons	10338	10924	11921	10820	12551
Refined oils, without sediment, tons	274	171	32	4	4
Processed liquid milk, 1000 liters	7652	7300	7728	9407	9771
Butter and dairy pastes, tons	1500	1886	5077	4416	4170
Cheese, 1000 tons	23	29	37	23	26
Cottage cheese, tons	1879	1809	1867	2625	2386
Sour cream, tons	6934	6231	5531	5858	7358
Tan (fermented dairy drink), tons	3906	4863	6070	4609	4056
Ice cream and edible ice, tons	7580	8534	9187	9736	9884
Wheat and rye flour, 1000 tons	201	158	187	176	143
Groats, coarsely ground flour, grains, and other cereal crop products, tons	1562	1695	1821	1815	2403
Fresh bread (non-long-term storage), 1000 tons	269	264	266	265	263
Cakes, pastries, fresh flour confectionery products (non-long-term storage), and other confectionery products, tons	8994	8942	8781	8385	8963
Biscuits, gingerbread and similar products, sweet biscuits, waffles and wafer sheets, tons	3961	4161	5100	4747	4509
Refined cane or beet sugar, tons	28771	23255	66661	29854	53777
Chocolate and sugar confectionery, tons	9747	9943	9021	8077	7451
Table salt, 1000 tons	28	33	23	20	21
Cognac, 1000 liters of 100% alcohol	-	18679	21510	19691	19918
Whiskey, 1000 liters of 100% alcohol	-	269	593	3031	5218
Vodka, liqueur, and other alcoholic beverages, 1000 liters of 100% alcohol	-	2083	1563	1676	1490
Grape wine, 1000 liters	10656	12829	11898	14262	9793
Mineral and carbonated waters, unsweetened, 1000 liters	46573	58305	54270	70286	56062
Natural mineral waters, non-carbonated, 1000 liters	49984	46666	64464	70872	74759
Other non-alcoholic beverages, 1000 liters	114171	139577	126823	154261	153849
Cigarettes, cigars, cigarillos, and similar products made from tobacco or tobacco substitutes, million pieces	28171	28197	32817	40332	42163

According to the 2024 structure data of the manufacturing industry by the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, in percentage terms within the total, food production accounts for 31.4%, beverage production for 10.3%, and tobacco product manufacturing for 8.8% [10].

The data of the Statistical Committee show that in recent years food production in our country has experienced stable growth (Table 2).

Table 2

**Indices of Production Volume by Types of Economic Activity
Compared to the Previous Year, % [11]**

Manufacturing Industry and Sub-sectors	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Industry	100,6	103,7	108,7	106,4	104,8
Manufacturing Industry	98,2	103,9	115,6	108,8	107,1
Food Production	101,9	103,9	107,4	96,6	104,2
Beverage Production	89,8	119,3	101,6	99,9	98,5
Tobacco Product Manufacturing	81,8	84,7	107,8	116,8	112,2

Despite the recorded growth, the data presented in Table 3 below show that regarding essential food products such as wheat, vegetable oil, sugar, and certain types of meat products, there is a problem of self-sufficiency.

Table 3

Self-Sufficiency of Essential Food Products, %, 2020–2024 [12]

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Wheat	24,4	23,2	24,4	27,9	22,8
Potatoes	101,1	111,7	98,4	99,2	106,2
Vegetables and melons/gourds	103,9	105,6	102,0	97,4	99,6
Fruits and berries	98,2	114,4	102,0	103,1	100,5
Grapes	108,0	106,7	106,6	106,6	103,7
Vegetable oil	0,9	0,6	0,1	0,0	0,0
Sugar	38,0	33,9	91,2	42,8	55,0
Eggs	100,3	98,8	99,2	98,8	98,9
Milk	82,0	87,7	83,4	80,2	78,6
Beef	87,3	92,2	89,7	90,7	88,0
Pork	45,1	53,2	47,3	48,0	49,7
Poultry meat	23,9	26,7	25,3	25,4	26,0
Fish	148,4	143,7	148,0	136,8	118,8

Negative changes in wheat self-sufficiency in the Republic of Armenia are mainly a result of the reduction in wheat sown areas. Despite the widely accepted approach that it is necessary to increase soil fertility and use high-yield wheat varieties, the expansion of wheat cultivation areas remains a priority. The increase in wheat sown areas should be combined with addressing the issue of uncultivated and inefficiently used arable land [13].

The low level of wheat self-sufficiency and dependence on imports indicate the strategic importance of increasing wheat production volumes, which can be achieved through improving yield levels [14]. Since our country faces the problem of closed borders and most imports are carried out through the Lars checkpoint, which is often closed during winter months, especially for freight transport, and sometimes experiences disruptions during other periods of the year, this leads to delays in the import of goods. Therefore, ensuring the supply of raw materials to the food industry through domestic production becomes highly important.

A considerable amount of food is imported into the Republic of Armenia, which helps address threats to food security. Large quantities of beef, pork, poultry meat, wheat, and milk powder are imported.

Table 4**Food Products Imported to the Republic of Armenia, 2020–2024, tones [15]**

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Wheat	350310,7	272463,4	364693,8	343562,3	316009,2
Flour	20973,9	20959,6	31546,0	65493,0	42296,3
Rice	11110,9	8917,3	11644,5	9882,1	10072,1
Pasta	14043,3	10830,0	15027,1	14379,1	12400,4
Sugar	43396,6	47724,4	5648,1	36778,4	40347,8
Vegetable oil	30615,8	27189,6	33903,6	33467,6	32575,4
Eggs	30,4	180,6	277,4	387,8	278,7
Poultry meat	34142,3	38454,9	38362,2	38783,4	40885,8
Beef	3882,5	4583,8	4978,4	4503,4	5626,2
Pork	5920,0	9807,8	11390,8	11123,6	13010,9
Milk (all types)	9421,7	9504,9	22275,6	16049,0	17778,5
Butter	4575,3	2590,5	4291,4	4393,7	4285,4
Cheese	1521,4	1782,7	2636,3	2966,4	3100,1
Vegetables	29378,8	33667,8	58951,3	45920,2	44627,6
of which: potatoes	2746,0	3430,8	5799,2	7752,8	1468,0
Fruits	95918,8	103183,4	102382,1	94804,8	105802,6
of which: grapes	2032,7	894,3	1213,6	784,2	1881,2
Melon crops	4956,5	6306,1	8030,0	9049,7	8900,5

The food industry addresses food security issues while simultaneously ensuring added value and creating new jobs.

Table 5**Average Annual Number of Employees by Types of Economic Activity (1,000 persons), [16]**

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Manufacturing Industry and Sub-sectors					
Total Industry	104,4	104,1	104,8	110,8	111,0
Manufacturing Industry	70,2	71,2	71,8	78,6	78,3
Food Production	21,4	20,8	19,6	21,4	22,1
Beverage Production	7,5	7,6	7,5	7,7	7,7
Tobacco Product Manufacturing	4,3	4,1	4,2	4,6	4,8

The data of Table 5 show that in all branches of the manufacturing industry, an increase in the number of jobs has been recorded. The Armenian food industry market is saturated with producing organizations, and the competitive struggle between them contributes to the emergence of environmental, managerial, and social issues, the solutions of which pursue not only narrow corporate economic interests but also public interests [17].

The development of the food safety sector is one of the important processes of the policy implemented in the agricultural sector of the RA economy, the aim of which is to provide consumers with high-quality and safe food products and ensure food security. The food production sector is directly related to the agricultural sector, the inevitable risks of which have an impact on the efficiency of the food industry.

The state implements targeted agricultural development programs. An important precondition for the development of the food industry is the use of domestic raw materials, which will ensure economic efficiency and contribute to improving food quality [18].

The consumption of food industry products is also influenced by fluctuations in the social condition of the population. Due to insufficient financial resources, consumers do not prioritize the purchase of safer food. Small and medium-sized enterprises engaged in food production may be subject to fines following inspections, while some rural households process milk under home conditions and sell products on the streets, posing a threat to public health. Food safety must be ensured regardless of the place of production, supply, storage, and consumption. State financial resources and capacities should be directed toward solving the above-mentioned problems, ensuring the production of safe food.

There is a need to develop a system through which scientifically grounded information can be transferred to industrial processing enterprises and regulatory and supervisory bodies, so that they can use this information for the purpose of producing safe food [19].

For food safety, it is important to improve legislation in the sector, ensure control at all stages of the food industry, and implement a continuous training system for specialists, among other measures. Some food-producing and processing enterprises in Armenia plan to export their products abroad. In this case, exported goods must comply with international standards, which will contribute to the supply of safe food to both international and local markets, protect consumer rights, and build trust in food quality.

Conclusion

The food industry holds an important place in the field of food security and is directly linked to the high-risk agricultural sector. The effectiveness of the food industry also depends on the social condition of the population. Due to insufficient financial resources, consumers do not demand the purchase of safer food. It is important to ensure the population is provided not only with sufficient quantity but also with high-quality food products, which will ensure people's health and intellectual strength. An important prerequisite for the development of the food industry is the use of domestic raw materials, which will support the agricultural sector and ensure economic efficiency.

The food industry addresses food security issues while simultaneously providing added value and creating new jobs.

As a result of the development of the food industry, we observe:

- an increase in the level of self-sufficiency, especially in strategically important goods that depend on imports,
- diversification of local production through increased processing of domestic raw materials,
- expansion of export potential, which, under conditions of a small market, will contribute to the stability of local producers.

These measures will contribute to the stability and development of the economy, agriculture, and the food industry, and will increase the population's quality of life and level of well-being.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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