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Kyrenia, TRNC

June 30 - July 2, 2025

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Mehmet Necati CIZRELIOGULLARI, Ph.D., TURKIYE

Ali KORKUT, Ph. D., TURKIYE

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FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS: A PRIORITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VEGETABLE SECTOR AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Dr. Gjovalin GJELOSHI

Department of Food Technology and Tourism, Qiriazi University College, Albania

Dr. Eriona DEDA

**Corresponding author, Agricultural University of Tirana, Faculty of Economics and
Agribusiness, Albania**

Abstract

This study focuses on food safety standards in the vegetable sector, using Albania as a case study, and emphasizes the sector's development as a national priority for ensuring consumer protection. The research is based on primary data collected in the field from three major counties, where a random sampling method was applied for the year 2025. The selected sample includes vegetable farmers engaged in the cultivation of fresh produce from the counties of Tirana, Fier, and Berat.

The sampling process was conducted randomly and relied on a structured questionnaire composed of closed-ended questions, divided into two main sections. The first section assesses whether the interviewed farmers implement food safety standards such as HACCP, ISO 22000, and Global GAP, or do not apply any standard at all. The second section focuses on government support in the vegetable sector, specifically in terms of subsidies, farmer training, provision of agricultural materials, and access to technical consultancy.

A total of 150 farmers were interviewed, with 50 participants from each district. The methodology adopted is descriptive, incorporating comparative statistical analyses expressed in percentages (Bajraktari & Deda, 2024).

The primary aim of this research is to evaluate the level of compliance with food safety standards among farmers cultivating fresh vegetables—whether in open fields or greenhouses—in order to safeguard consumer health. Additionally, the study proposes several governmental policy recommendations to enhance future support programs for farmers and reinforce consumer protection mechanisms.

Keywords: Food Safety Standards, Government Policies, Consumer Protection, Descriptive Analysis



1. Introduction

Food safety represents one of the most critical challenges of our time, particularly in sectors that directly impact consumer health and the economic development of a country. In Albania, the vegetable sector is an important source of agricultural production and has experienced continuous growth; however, it faces serious challenges related to the implementation of international food safety standards such as HACCP, ISO 22000, and GlobalG.A.P. Compliance with these standards is essential not only for consumer protection but also for enhancing the competitiveness of Albanian products in regional and international markets.

This study aims to assess the level of implementation of food safety standards in the vegetable sector in Albania, focusing on three major agricultural counties: Tirana, Fier, and Berat. Through an empirical analysis based on primary data collected in the field in 2025, the study includes a random sample of 150 farmers engaged in the cultivation of fresh vegetables, either in open fields or greenhouses. The structured questionnaire is divided into two main sections: the first evaluates the application of food safety standards, while the second assesses the level of governmental support in the form of subsidies, training, materials, and technical consultancy.

By applying a descriptive methodology supported by comparative statistical analyses expressed in percentages, the study seeks to highlight the current realities in the field and to propose concrete policies aimed at improving food safety practices and increasing institutional support for farmers. Through this research, the goal is to contribute to the sustainable development of the vegetable sector in Albania and to ensure safer products for both domestic and international consumers.

2. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive research approach with a quantitative character, relying on the collection and analysis of primary field data to evaluate the level of implementation of food safety standards and the role of institutional support in Albania's vegetable sector.

1. Population and Sample

The target population of the study consists of farmers cultivating fresh vegetables in greenhouses and open fields across three key agricultural counties in Albania: Tirana, Fier, and Berat. These counties were selected based on their high concentration of agricultural activity and their strategic importance in supplying the domestic vegetable market.



A simple random sampling method was employed to select a total of 150 farmers, with 50 farmers from each county. The sample is designed to capture a diverse range of practices and experiences among farmers regarding the application of food safety standards.

2. Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool used in this study is a structured questionnaire, divided into two main sections:

- **Section I:** Contains closed-ended questions assessing the level of implementation of food safety standards by farmers, specifically HACCP, ISO 22000, and GlobalG.A.P.
- **Section II:** Includes closed-ended questions regarding governmental support, such as training programs, subsidies, material assistance, and the provision of technical consultancy in the vegetable sector.

The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small number of farmers to ensure its clarity and validity before full-scale data collection.

Main Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to propose governmental policy measures aimed at promoting the certification of food safety standards among vegetable farmers, as well as to recommend supportive policies for the further development of this sector.

Analysis of the Results

Through the descriptive method we have processed the primary data in table and graphs, and have interpreted the following arguments (Bajraktari & Deda, 2024).



Table 1.

Source: Authors

Table 1 refers to the two key sections of the questionnaire, presenting the number of interviewed farmers by county and district, in relation to the application of food safety standards and certifications.

This analysis focuses on three districts in Albania:

1. Berat district, which includes the circles of Berat, Kuçovë, and Skrapar.
2. Fier district, comprising the circles of Fier, Lushnjë, and Mallakastër.
3. Tirana district, which encompasses the circles of Tiranë, Krujë, and Kavajë.

The study sample includes 50 farmers from each county, totaling 150 farmers who participated in the interviews.

Compliance with Certification Standards in Vegetable Production

The first section of the questionnaire focused on whether farmers adhere to certification standards for vegetable production, including HACCP, ISO 22000, and Global G.A.P.

In Berat district, 30% of the interviewed farmers reported compliance with HACCP standards. HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) is an international food safety system that identifies and controls hazards throughout all stages of production—from farm to consumer. The analysis results indicate that 30% of the farmers follow HACCP standards, while the remaining 70% do not. Notably, those who comply are typically engaged in export-oriented production and cooperate with collectors and processors that require certification. In **Fier district**, 35% of farmers reported adhering to HACCP standards. Similar to Berat, these farmers mainly produce for export and collaborate with collectors who mandate

Standards and certifications					Government support for farmers				
The district and the prefecture	Number of interviewed farmers	HACCP	ISO 22000	Global G.A.P	We have not implemented any relevant procedures	Subsidies	Training	Equipment/plant/materials	Technical consultancy
Berat	50	30%	5%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Fier	50	35%	6%	5%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Tirane	50	50%	8%	5%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%

certification. The other 65% admitted they do not strictly follow HACCP protocols.



In Tirana district, 50% of the farmers involved in vegetable production reported adherence to HACCP standards, supported by official certification documentation. These farmers also focus on export and work closely with certified supply chains. The remaining 50% could not provide documentation verifying compliance with HACCP standards.

Compliance with ISO 22000 Standards

ISO 22000 is an international standard for food safety management systems covering the entire food chain—from primary production to the final consumer. In the Albanian context, compliance remains limited due to several influencing factors. Only a small fraction of farmers have implemented or are certified under ISO 22000:

In Berat district, only 5% of farmers reported ISO 22000 implementation.

In Fier district, the figure stood at 6%.

In Tirana district, 8% reported compliance.

The majority of farmers cited lack of awareness about the standard, insufficient access to professional training, and the high costs of implementation and certification as primary barriers. Additionally, farmers noted that domestic markets do not typically demand such certifications, making the adoption of ISO 22000 less necessary in their view.

Compliance with Global G.A.P. Standards

Global G.A.P. (Good Agricultural Practices) is an international standard ensuring safe, sustainable, and environmentally friendly agricultural production. It is often required for export to the European Union and for cooperation with large retail chains.

In this study, none of the interviewed farmers across the three counties had certification documentation for Global G.A.P., indicating non-compliance with the standard. The main reasons cited were:

Lack of information and training opportunities,

High costs of certification and annual audits,

Small, unstructured farm operations that cannot meet documentation requirements,

Minimal demand for certification in the domestic market.

However, 5% of the farmers in Fier and 5% in Tirana reported compliance with Global G.A.P. standards. These were primarily members of cooperatives or organized farmer groups supported by international projects (e.g., GIZ, USAID, FAO, SNV). These farmers typically engage in export and are thus required to be certified to access international markets.

Government Support for Farmers

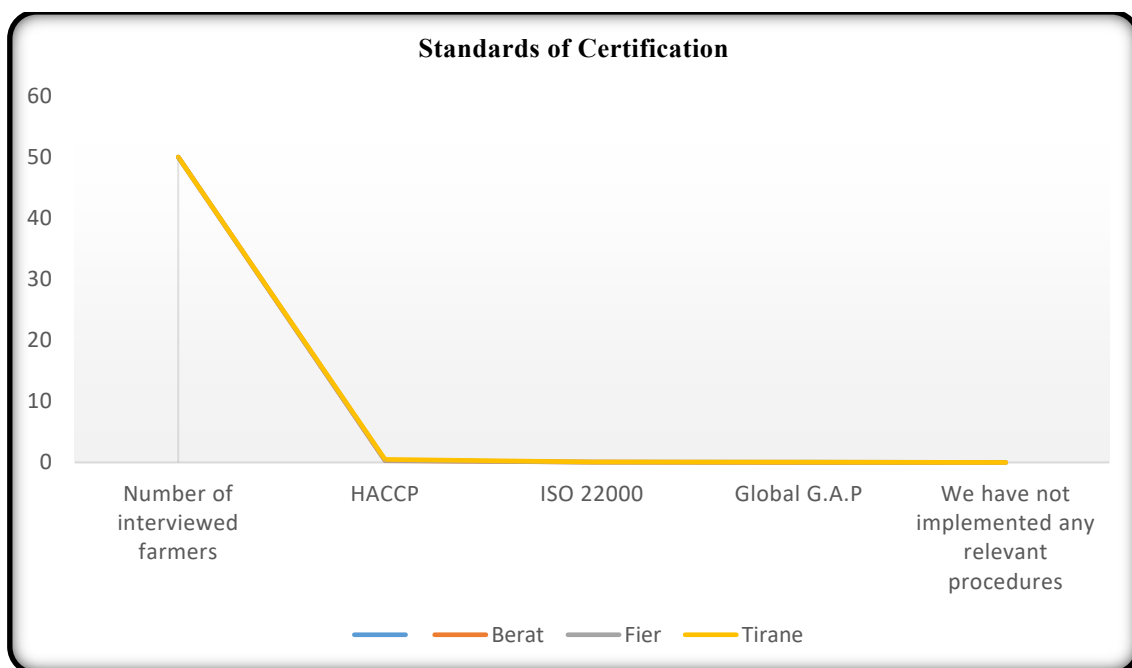
The second section of the questionnaire addressed governmental support. Only 5% of the interviewed farmers across all three counties—Berat, Fier, and Tirana—reported receiving



government subsidies. The majority of respondents argued that government support through subsidies was either insufficient or entirely lacking.

Additionally, regarding other forms of governmental assistance—such as training programs, material/equipment support, or technical consultancy—all respondents agreed that support in these areas was nonexistent.

Graph 1 : Illustrates the findings from the first section of the questionnaire, which investigates whether farmers in the vegetable sector comply with certification standards such as HACCP, ISO 22000, and Global G.A.P.



Source: Authors



According to Graph 1, which relates to the first section of the questionnaire assessing whether farmers comply with certification standards in the vegetable production sector—namely HACCP, ISO 22000, and Global G.A.P.—the findings reveal the following:

On average, 38.3% of the interviewed farmers in Berat, Fier, and Tirana counties reported that they adhere to HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) standards. This certification system is internationally recognized for identifying and controlling food safety hazards throughout the production process.

It is important to highlight that only a very small proportion of Albanian farmers included in the study have implemented or obtained certification for ISO 22000. Specifically, across the counties of Berat, Fier, and Tirana, only an average of 6.3% of farmers reported having implemented ISO 22000 standards. This low adoption rate indicates limited awareness, training, and access to the necessary resources for implementation.

Regarding compliance with Global G.A.P. (Good Agricultural Practices) standards, none of the interviewed farmers across these counties possessed formal certification documents, indicating non-compliance with this standard.

According to respondents, only an average of 3.3% of farmers in Berat, Fier, and Tirana adhere to Global G.A.P. standards. These farmers typically belong to cooperatives or organized farmer groups supported by international development projects (e.g., GIZ, USAID, FAO, SNV, etc.). Such farmers are often involved in export-oriented production, where compliance with Global G.A.P. is mandatory to access international markets.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions on the Topic: “Implementation of Food Safety Standards in the Vegetable Sector in Albania”.

Based on the analysis of primary data collected from three representative counties of Albania—Tirana, Fier, and Berat—and applying a random sampling methodology along with statistical analysis, the following key conclusions can be drawn:

- **Limited Implementation of Food Safety Standards**
A significant portion of the interviewed farmers still do not fully implement international standards such as HACCP, ISO 22000, or Global G.A.P. This indicates a lack of access to proper quality control and management systems within the vegetable sector, thereby exposing consumers to potential food safety risks.
- **Regional Disparities in Implementation Levels**
There are notable differences among the counties in terms of the level of implementation of food safety standards.
- **These variations may be attributed to local factors such as institutional support, farmers’ educational levels, and access to information and training.**
- **Government Support is Insufficient and Uncoordinated**
According to the farmers' responses, state support—whether in the form of subsidies, technical materials, training programs, or expert consultation—is sporadic



and often lacks a structured approach. This acts as a major barrier to the adoption of modern production practices and food safety assurance systems (Deda, E, 2017)

- Policy and Institutional Interventions are Needed
The results highlight an urgent need for new supportive policies aimed at strengthening farmers' capacities (Deda, 2017). This should include regular training programs, improved access to technical information, and economic incentives for adopting food safety standards (Deda, E, 2017).
- Raising Awareness of Food Safety is Crucial
In the absence of a well-established food safety culture, awareness campaigns, the role of media, and agricultural education must be considered key elements in improving the current situation.

Recommendations on Government Policies in the Field of Food Safety in Albania's Vegetable Sector

1. Development of a National Food Safety Strategy in Agriculture
The government should formulate a comprehensive national strategy that clearly outlines objectives for the implementation of international standards such as HACCP, ISO 22000, and Global G.A.P. within the vegetable sector (Papua New Guinea National Food Security Policy, 2018) (Arsanti & Perkasa, 2022).
2. Dedicated Subsidies for Farmers Implementing Standards
Specific subsidies should be offered to farmers who become certified under international food safety standards, helping to reduce the costs associated with acquiring equipment and implementing these systems (Deda, E, 2017).
3. Regular Training and Education Programs for Farmers
Continuous training programs must be designed and implemented for farmers, with a focus on good agricultural practices (GAP), quality control, input management, and record-keeping in accordance with international certification requirements (Arsanti & Perkasa, 2022).
4. Strengthening Control and Monitoring Structures
Relevant institutions—such as the National Food Authority (AKU) and the Ministry of Agriculture—should be empowered with sufficient human resources, technology, and logistics to ensure effective, regular, and impartial field inspections (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2022).
5. Facilitating Access to Credit for Quality-Enhancing Investments
Low-interest financing schemes should be provided to support investments in agricultural infrastructure that enable compliance with food safety standards (e.g.,



storage facilities, irrigation systems, laboratory equipment, etc.) (Arsanti & Perkasa, 2022).

6. Public Awareness Campaigns on Food Safety
The government should launch public information campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of producing safe food and the benefits of standard implementation—for farmers, consumers, and the national economy as a whole (Deda, E, 2017).

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ANNEX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire on Food Safety Standards in the Vegetable Sector

Section 1 of the Questionnaire: Do you comply with certification standards: HACCP, ISO 22000, and Global G.A.P

Standards and certifications

District and Prefecture	Number of farmers interviewed	HACCP	ISO 22000	Global G.A.P
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Berat

Standards and Certifications

District and Prefecture	Number of farmers interviewed	HACCP	ISO 22000	Global G.A.P
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Fier

Standards and Certifications

District and Prefecture	Number of farmers interviewed	HACCP	ISO 22000	Global G.A.P
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Tirane

II. Section Two of the Questionnaire: Provision of Government Support to Farmers

Does the Albanian government provide support to farmers? Please review the options in the questionnaire regarding whether the government offers support to farmers, and provide your argument.

Government Support for Farmers

The interviewed farmer	The Berat district	Subsidies	Trainings	Equipment/Plant materials	Consultancy technical
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Government Support for Farmers

The
interviewed
farmer

The Fier
district

Subsidies

Trainings

Equipment/Plant

Consultancy

materials

technical

Government Support for Farmers

The
interviewed
farmer

The Tirana
district

Subsidies

Trainings

Equipment/Plant

Consultancy

materials

technical