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## Editorial

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**Biographical notes:** Demetris Vrontis is a Professor and an Executive Dean at the University of Nicosia in Cyprus, where he has also served as Head of the Marketing Department and as Dean of the School of Business. He is the President of the EuroMed Research Business Institute and the Editor-in-Chief of the *EuroMed Journal of Business*. He is also a Visiting Professor, Visiting Research Fellow and collaborates with various Universities and organisations around the globe. He is a certified Chartered Marketer and Business Consultant and has widely published in over 180 refereed journals and 25 books and gave numerous presentations in international conferences.

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Over the last decades, important changes have affected the world agriculture and food systems, in line with the structural changes of economies. In particular, the agri-food sector has been characterised by a remarkable process of industrialisation and globalisation, both in terms of the model and paradigms and of concrete practices associated with these (FAO, 2017; Lamine et al., 2014). These processes, in some way very fast, have had a significant impact on business structures, leading to a deep transformation of the organisational models and changing the company dynamics. Addressing these dynamics is then crucial in order to dominate key food and agriculture policy debates at the global level (Thompson and Scoones, 2009). Transition processes of agri-food systems at the territorial scale and not, highlight the linkages among farming systems, agri-food chains and several actors from production to consumption (Lamine et al., 2014). Indeed, food systems approach covers food, agriculture, and health fields (Neff et al., 2015). In this scenario constantly evolving, agribusiness firms, in order both to keep their advantage on the world market place, and to respond to the increasing consumer demand for sustainable products (Ross et al., 2015), have fielded efforts to introduce new organisational models and paradigms in their corporate cultures for pursuing both sustainability and efficiency (Rankin et al., 2011). Today, the concepts of sustainability and social responsibility in the agri-food systems have become of high significance for food and agricultural companies for the strong impact on the economy, the environment and on society (Hartmann, 2011). However, the power in the food chain has to be taken into account to achieve social responsibility (Spence and Bourlakis, 2009). These new dynamics incorporate important policy implications in small business, that highlight the value of food chain and systems approach (Ericksen et al., 2010). In this scenario, managers are constantly making decisions among strategic solutions to produce a competitive advantage in an attempt to earn above-average returns (Newton et al., 2015). Innovations, also triggered by environmental standards, play a fundamental role in the improvement of the business efficiency and performance and maintaining competitive advantage in global markets (Zouaghi and Sánchez, 2016). In fact, as assert Läßle et al. (2015) innovation in agriculture can contribute both to achieving increased quality products and simultaneously preserving the environment. Porter and van der Linde (2007) emphasise that the innovations enable businesses to make more productive use of business resources, thereby compensating the costs that they need to reduce the environmental impact. Numerous businesses, in order to survive to the competitive pressure of the market, have instead chosen to adopt a differentiation strategy.

It is widely recognised that firms' differentiation strategy not only has a direct and significant impact on firm performance but also it has indirect and significant impact on firm performance through financial measures (Teeratansirikool et al., 2013). However, the adopted differentiation strategy allows to sustain the current performance of firm in the future, to a greater extent than a cost leadership strategy, despite having a greater systematic risk and more unstable performance (Rajiv et al., 2014).

Therefore facing the challenges of recent dynamics and systems in the agri-food sector has become a more and more pressing and multifaceted goal of the agri-food firms. All of this has motivated the Research Committee in Agribusiness of the EuroMed Research Business Institute (EMRBI) to promote a special issue on "Recent dynamics and systems in the Agri-food sector" of *International Journal of Globalisation and Small Business (IJGSB)* in order to explore and capture the main intrinsic and extrinsic dynamics. We have selected six papers that even without covering all the relevant issues related to the recent dynamics of the agricultural and food systems reveal interesting aspects to be highlighted.

Specifically, Camanzi et al. in their study 'Quality differentiation in the Italian wine industry: *terroir*-based vs. brand-based strategies' develop an industrial organisational model in order to explain the incentives for wine firms to adopt quality differentiation strategies, based on the *Terroir* or on the brand, in a competitive context. The importance of *Terroir*, able to determine, through specific properties (altitude, microclimate, native plant species, and soil type), the special quality of agricultural and food products, has been emphasised also by Alfeo et al. 'New development opportunities for the craft brewing segment: the case study of a micro-malthouse'. The authors use a cost benefit analysis (CBA) in order to evaluate the profitability of an investment related to the production of beer using malt derived from small batches of local cereals and pseudo cereals. Number of strategies is adopted by firms operating in the agro-food sector in order to survive in the global market place. This is revealed in the study of Ramos et al., Titled 'Transformation of Colombian small coffee growers and new scenarios for their competitiveness'. The authors review the main measures implemented at government level to improve the competitive advantage of small coffee growers. In this respect, they conclude that fair trade, is a relevant tool capable of improve socio-economic conditions of Colombian coffee producers.

On the consumption side, it has to be noticed that consumer seems to cover more and more the role of an aware and responsible citizen in order to align with the new globalisation and eco-friendly systems. Marotta et al. in their study 'How the social responsibility creates value: models of innovation in Italian pasta industry' explore by means of the analysis of a case study in the pasta industry how the social responsibility can become a strategic orientation and a competitive asset for the enterprises. The study makes use of specific indicators starting from the main approaches proposed at European (Triple Bottom Line) and international level (Global Reporting Initiative). In line with this, we selected a study conducted through a survey in Lithuania by Šimanskienė et al. 'Social responsibility in the food sector: consumer approach' that aims at finding out what, in the respondents' opinion, consumers expect from socially responsible food industry companies, and to what extent consumers are willing to support activities of the companies that meet their expectations. Results highlight socially responsible behaviour of food companies has become a quality element for customers, but the latter not necessarily are willing to pay a SR labelled product more than a non-SR labelled other one.

Another sustainable challenge in the agri-food systems is avoiding food losses and waste since it has become crucial and pressing for the entire world. The paper ‘Attitude towards food waste reduction: the case of Italian consumers’ by Fiore et al. aims at exploring the food waste dynamics by analysing Italian consumer behaviour in the perspective to give insight on the need to reach an ethics and sustainable approach by changing planning and shopping routines.

In conclusion, the papers presented in this special issue confirm an increasing interest for sustainability of the agricultural and food system and related sectors highlighting, however, the need for a shared commitment by all the stakeholders in order to ensure a truly sustainable development.

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