

Estonian consumers attitudes to organic food

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Key words: Estonian consumers, organic food

Abstract

The study of 740 Estonian occasional consumers has shown that 60 % of them are willing to buy organic products mainly because these contain fewer additives than conventional products. Therefore the consumers consider them first of all more natural and healthier. Preferred products are organic vegetables and fruits. Consumers prefer to buy them from supermarkets. Common awareness about organic farming needs improvement – only 11% of consumers felt themselves entirely informed.

Introduction

In Estonia organic farming has developed rapidly. During the last seven years the area and the number of farms increased ten times – almost seventy thousand ha with more than thousand farms practise organic management. The rapid increase has happened mainly due to intensive promotional work in 1999-2002, as well as to the growing governmental interest in the development of organic farming (including area support for organic farming from 2000 onwards and the support for farmers' training). In spite of organic area increase the organic market is still poorly developed. To understand the factors limiting the market development, the study of consumer attitudes to organic food was carried out.

Materials and methods

On the request of the Estonian Ministry of Agriculture in January 2005 the survey was carried out to establish what preferences Estonian consumers have in food products buying, how much they know about organic agriculture, whether they recognise the organic label, what kind of organic products and which marketing channel they prefer. A special questionnaire was compiled. Closed and multiple choice questions were posed: 740 occasional consumers were interviewed and their answers analysed.

Results and discussion

In purchasing food products for Estonian consumers the most important values are freshness (95% of respondents), taste (93%) and quality (92%). Also, favorable price and local origin had an impact for 60% of consumers. 11% of respondents had sufficient information about organic farming, 54% consumers answered that they had certain information but they did not know anything about the organic control system, 32% - were not informed and 3% - did not want to know anything about organic farming. Anyway, 60% of consumers are willing to buy organic products because they

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contain fewer additives than conventional products. Therefore consumers consider organic products first of all more natural and healthier (Figure 1). Research in other countries has shown the similar motivation (Ekelund, 2005; Midmore et al., 2006; Sylvander, Martine, 2006).

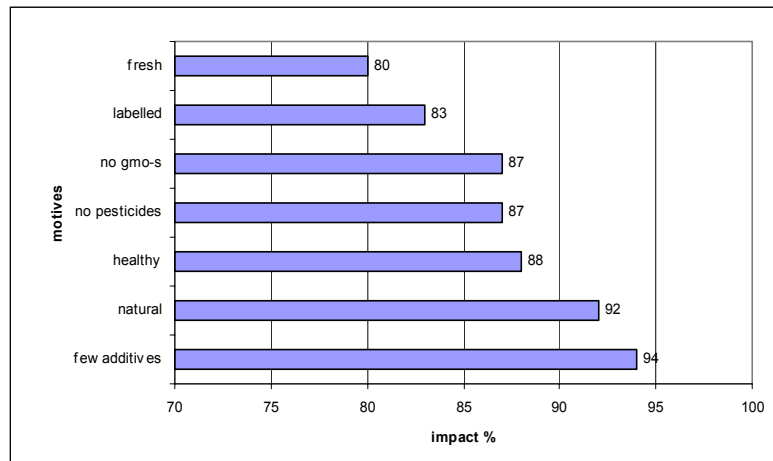


Figure 1: Main motives for organic product buying of the Estonian consumers

First of all consumers want to buy organic vegetables (75% of respondents), fruits (72%), milk products (60%), honey (58%), meat products (57%), bakery products (54%) and herbs (44%).

Most of the consumers (44%) prefer to buy organic food from supermarkets but 23% are also ready to purchase directly from farms and 18% from markets. Unfortunately, in the current situation in Estonian supermarkets the choice of organic products is very limited because organic processing is poorly developed. Direct marketing from farms is highly dominating. The key issues for the Estonian organic market are the development of organic processing and consumers' awareness.

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