

# **Consumption of Organic Foods from a Life History Perspective:**

## **An Explorative Study among Danish Consumers**

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# 1. Exploring the Development of Organic Consumption in Denmark

This study explores the development of organic consumption among Danish consumers from the biographical perspective of consumers themselves, as narrated in personal interviews. Similar qualitative studies have been undertaken concurrently in Britain and in Italy in close cooperation with other partners in the EU-funded research project: QualitativeLowInputFood<sup>1</sup>. The results of these qualitative studies will be compared and findings supplemented by a quantitative analysis of household purchases of organic foods in Britain, Denmark and Italy, which is also being undertaken concurrently. The common objectives of these studies and the methods employed in the qualitative investigations are outlined in section 1.1, while the context of the Danish study – the development of organic market in Denmark – is briefly described in section 1.2.

## 1.1 Objectives and methods

These studies were designed to contribute to the over-all objectives of achieving a differentiated understanding of the development of the organic market in Europe and a basis for assessing the likely future development of European demand for organic foods. The over-all objective of each of the qualitative studies is to delineate the chronological development of purchasing decisions with respect to organic food products among specific household types within a particular market.

The more specific objectives of the qualitative studies are: (1) to characterise the development of conceptions of organic products, producers and production methods, as these have developed among consumers distinguished by household type and frequency of purchases made, and (2) to identify the character of the original motivations to purchase organic food products and the subsequent development of motivations to limit, change or expand the selection of product categories, seen in relation to the social contexts in which purchasing decisions are made.

The objectives of the qualitative studies were formulated in the light of earlier studies, indicating differences between the motivational patterns of “committed”, long-term consumers of organic products on the one hand –sometimes referred to as dedicated, core, faithful, loyal, regular or heavy users – and, on the other hand, new consumers of organic products, assumed to be “uncommitted”, unfaithful or disloyal, occasional or light users (Midmore *et al.* 2005; Francois & Sylvander 2006). Analyses of household panel data had revealed that purchasing patterns are subject to dynamic changes, but the social contexts in which purchasing decisions are made remained unclear. The extent to which decisions to purchase/not to purchase organic products reflect (a) changes in the household, such as the birth of a baby or the loss of a job, (b) changes in the market, such as the introduction or withdrawal of organic products on the part of a local supplier, or (c) changes in consumer conceptions of organic products, producers and production methods, was not known. These were the issues our qualitative studies were designed to explore in depth <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For further details, see: [www.qlif.org](http://www qlif.org). The present study constitutes part of Subproject 1.2.2.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed account of objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, sampling procedure and data collection methods, including screening questionnaire, interview guides and protocol for participant observation studies, is presented in *Protocol for QLIF 1.2.2 Qualitative Study* (2006), ed. by K O’Doherty Jensen in co-operation with T B Lund (University of Copenhagen), N Ayers, P Midmore (University of Aberystwyth) and S Naspatti and R Zanoli (University of Ancona).

## Theoretical Framework

Our research design was inspired by theoretical contributions regarding the cognitive processes that underlie changes of mind (Gardner 2004), and the substitution strategies that arise in the context of everyday shopping with respect to the character of product loyalty (Dick & Basu 1994).

According to Gardner's account of the cognitive processes involved in changing one's mind, the concepts, stories and theories, in terms of which one views objects, artefacts, phenomena or signs, can undergo changes that may take place abruptly or gradually over time. On the assumption that the purchase and consumption of organic food products may involve (or possibly has involved at some time in the past) a change of mind with regard to food experiences and food habits, we decided to employ Gardner's theory in designing our study and analysing our data. This account was particularly suited to the purpose of exploring consumer concepts and shopping behaviour insofar as a change of mind is understood to have practical consequences for changes in habitual behaviour. What happens in the mind, according to this theory, ultimately involves changes of behaviour: If "...changes that occur within the mind... do not result in present or future changes of behaviour, then they are not of interest here." (Gardner 2004: 5)

Seven factors or 'levers' that may influence a mind change are identified as follows: (1) *reasons* (referring to justifications within a given conceptual universe), (2) *research* (relevant experiences, data and information), (3) *resonance* (the affective component), (4) *re-descriptions* (mutually reinforcing images of what will result from a change), (5) *resources and rewards* (the perceived cost-benefit relationship), (6) *real world events* (in households, markets, etc.), and (7) *resistances* (to change). The latter factor refers to the cognitive component of barriers to change. Any of the first six factors may operate singly or in consort, tending to function as a lever that may induce a change of mind. Gardner employs the image of a "tipping point" to refer to a situation in which the balance, so to speak, shifts. Several relevant factors may reinforce each other, bringing a new viewpoint or goal within sight. The concepts of *tipping points* and *levers* (with particular reference to *reasons*, *research*, *resources*, *rewards*, *real world events* and *resistances*) are primarily employed in the analysis presented here in Chapter 3, in which we explore consumer concepts and stories with reference to changes of mind and behaviour. We have also found it useful in our analysis of the Danish data to distinguish *resources* (referring to the use of time or money) from *rewards* (perceived benefits), rather than conceiving this as a single factor referring to a rational calculation of cost-benefit on the part of the consumer.

Our exploration of consumer loyalty with regard to organic products is directly inspired by Dick and Basu's account of indicators of product loyalty (1994), according to which relative loyalty is assessed in the light of the following:

1. How likely it is that a given customer will search for alternatives
2. How resistant the customer is to counter-persuasion (presented by competing, substitute products)
3. How likely the customer is to tell others about the preferred product (word-of-mouth recommendation).

The first two of these points regard substitution strategies the consumer is likely to adopt in a shopping situation in which a sought for product is out of stock or is not available for other reasons. In designing this study, five substitution strategies ('Close Substitution', 'Re-try', 'Re-locate', 'Surrender' and 'Treason') were distinguished with reference to organic products. These are defined in Chapter 4 of this report and employed in our analysis of substitution strategies in section 4.1, while our findings regarding the likelihood that a consumer will tell others about their preferred organic products are presented in section 3.3.

## Materials and methods

The design of this study was based on the policy that the goal of obtaining richly detailed qualitative data should not be sacrificed to that of obtaining a larger sample. Accordingly the decision made was to limit sample size to 18 households drawn from two geographical areas within each national market, and to extend methods of data collection beyond the relatively narrow confines of single personal interviews with selected subjects. It was decided that half of the principal subjects would be drawn from households resident within the region of the capital city (or other major metropolitan city) and its surrounding area, and half from households resident in or near an averaged-sized town, identified on the basis of national demographic data. Preliminary analysis of quantitative household panel data in Britain and Denmark had clearly indicated relatively high levels of consumption of organic foods in the areas of the capital cities and relatively low levels in rural areas (Denver & Christensen 2006). The small sample size in these qualitative studies, however, did not permit the introduction of three or more geographical areas, distinguished by level of urbanisation, to each sample. Given a relatively small sample size, it was decided that ethnographic methods would be employed, focused upon oral narratives featuring biographical accounts and detailing important events that have influenced decisions regarding food purchases and food consumption in the household, supplemented by observation studies.

### *Population and sample*

As noted, the study population was limited to two geographical regions. In Denmark, apart from the region of greater Copenhagen, the town of Slagelse (40,000 inhabitants) and its surrounding area was selected. A further limitation had been introduced by a policy decision to the effect that the selection of different kinds of shopping venues in which subjects might be recruited should be made in approximate accordance with the types of sales channels through which organic food products are sold on the national market. Since approximately 85% of organic foods on the Danish market are sold in supermarkets or discount stores, while the remainder is sold through other channels, this entailed that the greater part of the Danish sample would be drawn from households that usually shop in supermarkets or discounts stores.

The following inclusion criteria were established in regard to characteristics of all principle subjects:

- Age within the range of 25-69 years
- The subject has exclusive or shared responsibility for household shopping
- The subject exhibits involvement in food quality (as measured by a cut off point on a standardized involvement scale).

A quota sampling method regarding the criteria of gender, distribution of age-groups, household types and frequency with which organic foods are purchased, was developed in the light of available quantitative data as follows:

- In at least 4 (and maximum 6) of all 18 households, the main food purchaser is male, preferably 2 men being included in the sample for each region/sub-group.
- The sample will include a minimum of 2 households in each of the following categories:
  - Single persons without children (one-person households, age unspecified)
  - Young adult couples without children (respondent aged 25-35 years)
  - Adult(s) with child/children under the age of 11 years (respondent's age unspecified)
  - Older couples without children or whose children no longer live at home, (respondent aged 55-69 years).
- Each regional sub-group in each country will comprise 4 *regular* users, 3 *occasional* users and 2 *non-users* of organic food products.

- *Regular* users are defined as those who report purchasing one or more of the following products *one or more times per week*: organic bread, fruit/vegetables, dairy products or eggs.
- *Occasional* users are defined as those who buy one or more of the above products *less often than once per week* and do not buy any of these products as often as once per week.
- *Non-users* are defined as those who reported *never* buying an organic variant of these products.

All principle subjects recruited to this study were screened with regard to these characteristics, using a standardised, structured questionnaire. The characteristics of the Danish sample are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Consumers interviewed**

REGULAR USERS	ID	Age	Gender	Secondary Subject Characteristics	Region	Household Composition
	Regular user A	35-54	Female	Close friend	Copenhagen	Single adult, child(ren) <11
	Regular user B	35-54	Female	Husband	Copenhagen	Couple, child(ren) <11
	Regular user C	34-55	Female	Partner	Slagelse	Couple Household, empty Nest
	Regular user D	25-34	Female	Close friend	Slagelse	Young Couple, child(ren) <11
	Regular user E	55-69	Female	Missing	Slagelse	Single household, empty nest
	Regular user F	55-69	Female	Daughter	Copenhagen	Single household, empty nest
	Regular user G	34-45	Female	Son	Slagelse	Single household child(ren) > 11
	Regular user H	25-34	Male	Missing	Copenhagen	Young adult, lives with room mate
OCCASIONAL USERS	ID	Age	Gender	Secondary Subject Characteristics		Household Composition
	Occasional user A	55-69	Female	Close friend	Copenhagen	Single, empty nest
	Occasional user B	25-34	Male	Wife	Copenhagen	Young Couple, no children
	Occasional user C	25-34	Female	Husband	Copenhagen	Young Couple, no children
	Occasional user D	34-54	Female	Husband	Slagelse	Couple child(ren) > 11
	Occasional user E	55-69	Female	Missing	Slagelse	Older Couple (55-69)
	Occasional user F	25-34	Male	Wife	Slagelse	Young Couple, child(ren) < 11
NON- USERS	ID	Age	Gender	Secondary Subject Characteristics		Household Composition
	Non user A	55-69	Male	Wife	Copenhagen	Older Couple (55-69)
	Non user B	35-54	Female	Parents	Slagelse	Single adult, child(ren) > 11
	Non user C	25-34	Male	Missing	Slagelse	Young couple, children < 11
	Non user D	25-34	Female	Husband	Slagelse	Young couple, children < 11

It should be noted that differences between user groups, as defined in the research protocol, regard the frequency with which organic products are purchased and that frequency levels established for this purpose were established in light of available quantitative data and designed to facilitate comparison between British, Danish and Italian consumers. By Danish standards, these frequencies are set at a low level. Due to considerable social and cultural differences between the three countries at issue<sup>3</sup>, it was decided that the most appropriate means of identifying potential subjects and establishing the first contact with them should be adapted to local conditions.

### ***Methods of data collection***

The main method of data collection takes the form of a semi-structured narrative interview, informed by interview guidelines, with each principle subject. The topics covered were: (1) main events in the life of the subject, prompting when necessary with regard to events that had influenced ways in which household shopping was done or meals that were prepared at home; (2) recollections regarding when (if ever) and where organic foods were first purchased, what was purchased and how shopping for organic products developed subsequently; (3) why organic foods were purchased (or not) and how the subjects thoughts about this topic have developed or changed since.

The following supplementary methods of data collection were also employed, each of which was informed by interview/observational guidelines:

- Participant observation and supplementary interview with principle subjects

The researcher accompanied the subject on a shopping trip to one or more of the venues usually frequented by the subject and undertook a second (de-briefing) interview, usually in the subject's home while unpacking shopping. These data include direct observation and conversational exchange during the trip, as well as supplementary interview data regarding decisions made with respect to actual purchases and purchases that were considered but not made during this trip. This method was designed to explore possible substitution strategies employed by the principal subject while shopping, and to supplement data regarding product loyalty obtained in the course of the main interview. All shopping trips were to be video-recorded with a view to cross-validating findings and to obtaining supplementary visual data.

- Semi-structured interviews with secondary subject / member of the principle subject's household

A member of the household (aged 15 years or older) was interviewed or, in the case of one-person households, these interviews were to be undertaken with a relatively close member of the principle subject's family or with a close friend suggested by the principle subject. These interviews were designed to cross-validate findings and to obtain a broader understanding of the wider context of food consumption in the household, with particular reference to organic foods.

- Semi-structured interviews with shopkeepers/managers of specialty (organic) stores

In the event that the principal subject and the shopkeeper or manager of the shop(s) in which the shopping trip had been undertaken were personally known to each other, these shopkeepers were to be interviewed. These interviews were also designed to obtain supplementary data regarding the principal subject's shopping habits and to cross-validate findings.

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<sup>3</sup> These differences include: the frequency with which telephone interviewing is employed for research purposes; the frequency with which organic foods are purchased; the sales channels through which organic foods are sold, and the extent to which shopkeepers or managers are familiar with their customers.

### ***Recruitment and data collection***

Data were collected during the period December 2006 to May 2007. Recruitment in Denmark was initially carried out by CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviews) with regard to the quota of informants that shop in supermarkets and discount stores, and by observation and initial contact interviews undertaken in other shopping outlets with regard to other informants. Initial contact in both cases was followed by standardised screening by means of telephone interview.

Sampling procedure entailed that approximately 15 subjects would be consumers, who ordinarily do their shopping in supermarkets or discount stores, while 8 of 18 subjects would be 'regular users' of organic foods, as defined. It should be noted that the Danish sample of 'regular users' includes consumers who report buying organic variants within no more than two product categories at least once per week<sup>4</sup>. This sub-group is therefore by no means coincident with 'core', 'heavy' or 'committed' consumers of organic products, as previously identified in earlier studies of Danish consumers (Weir *et al.* 2005; O'Doherty Jensen 2006)<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, it proved somewhat difficult to identify potential 'occasional users', as defined, since relatively many potential informants bought organic products with somewhat greater frequency. The sample at issue in this study, including relatively many who buy mainstream products at discount stores, has not previously been studied with respect to organic consumption.

Interviews with principal subjects and with most secondary subjects took place in the home of the principal subject. The duration of the main interviews was between one and two hours, while most secondary interviews were completed in less than one hour. The principal subjects recruited to this study expressed interest in the topic and in the prospect of shopping in the company of the researcher, and readily cooperated in the research project<sup>6</sup>. The quality of the secondary interviews proved to be somewhat more variable. In eleven cases in which interviews were conducted with the partner of the principal subject or with close family members, not all of whom were living in the same household as the principal subject, the information obtained was rich and nuanced. Beliefs and habits, as narrated by the principal subject, were validated in all cases. In three cases in which friends were interviewed, it transpired that they were not particularly well acquainted with the principal subject's food habits, particularly with reference to everyday shopping. These interviews did not serve the purpose of validation, or did so only in a tentative fashion. Finally, it proved impossible to obtain secondary interviews in four of the 18 cases, either because the principal subject was unable to indicate a particular relevant person to interview or the secondary subject was unwilling or unable to cooperate.

All interviews and shopping trips were audio-recorded and full transcriptions subsequently made. Shopping trips were also video-recorded with the aid of an inconspicuous video/audio tape device concealed in the clothes of the interviewer. While interview subjects were fully informed about all recording, it was thus possible to undertake participant observation of shopping expeditions in a manner that did not embarrass the principal informant or draw any particular attention from other customers or staff.

Most shopping trips, including a de-briefing interview, lasted approximately half an hour, the longest lasting more than one hour, and took place in the vicinity of the principal subjects home or place of work. Several shopping trips included more than one shop, but only in one case were as many as three shops frequented. Shopkeepers/managers and principal subjects were in no instance personally known to each other. It was not relevant therefore to undertake interviews with shopkeepers in the Danish context.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix I, Table A, for details regarding actual purchasing frequencies among user groups in the Danish sample.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1, Table B, for details regarding a distinction later introduced in our analysis between 'dedicated' regular users and other regular users.

<sup>6</sup> Data in 17 of 18 cases were collected by Thomas Bøker Lund and in one case only by Katherine O'Doherty Jensen.

### ***Coding and analysis***

A standardised codebook was developed jointly by the research teams in Britain, Denmark and Italy, following the procedure and logic of team-based codebook development with reference to qualitative data (Macqueen *et al.* 1998; Berends *et al.* 2005). This task was based upon preliminary interpretations of national data and coding of one British case by the coders in all three countries with a view to promoting inter-coder reliability. Coding of interview data and observations was undertaken with the aid of the NVIVO 7 software program, which also served as a device facilitating data management in the course of in-depth analysis.

Analysis of these data followed a thematic analysis methodology, developed in accordance with the themes of the interview and observational guidelines, which in turn had been designed in light of the theoretical framework of this study. This approach was supplemented by the pursuit of inductive thematic analysis with regard to the exploration of patterns in the Danish data.

**Table 2: Categorization of Danish shopping outlets<sup>7</sup>**

	Discount chains:	Intermediate level supermarkets:	Upmarket supermarkets:
<b>Shopping outlets referred to in citations from subjects or in the course of analysis:</b>	<i>ALDI</i> <i>LIDL</i> <i>NETTO</i>	<i>BRUGSEN</i> <i>FØTEX</i> <i>ISO</i> <i>KVICKLY</i> <i>SUPER BRUGSEN</i>	<i>EGEFELD</i> (Stocks organic products only) <i>IRMA</i> (Stocks 800 organic variants)

When citing interview material in the analysis presented in the following chapters, each principal subject is identified by reference to his or her user-group and ID, as noted in Table 1, where further details regarding gender, age-group, household type, geographical region or (when relevant) character of relationship to secondary subjects, can be consulted by the reader. Occasionally reference will be made to a ‘case’ referring to all interview materials and observations with reference to one principal subject. Reference is also made at a number of points in our analysis to shopping outlets, including supermarket chains that may not be familiar to the reader. To avoid confusion, names of shops/chains are italicised and capitalised throughout the text and for ease of reference, their distinguishing characteristics are summarised in Table 2.

## **1.2 The development of the organic market in Denmark**

A relatively high market share for organic foods was achieved in Denmark during the 1990s. By the turn of the century, the share was approximately 5 % of the total food market and among the highest levels in European countries. The combined efforts of government authorities and organic farmer organisations

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<sup>7</sup> This categorisation merely refers to differences in price level that appear to be commonly recognised by Danish consumers, as observed by the authors of this report. The term ‘intermediate level supermarkets’ refers to a number of chains that otherwise differ with regard to size, assortment (including non-food departments), quality and other factors.

played a central role in this development, on the background of increasing public concern about environmental problems.

As from 1987, state subsidies were granted to farmers converting to organic production. A national label, the 'Ø-label'<sup>8</sup>, was introduced in 1989, guaranteeing state control of the certification of production, processing, packaging and labelling of organic food products. These initiatives received considerable attention from the media, serving in turn to promote some public awareness of the principles and methods of organic farming as compared to conventional farming. Moreover, the introduction of state controlled certification served to keep potential competition from other organic labels out of the market. The Ø-label rapidly gained the status of a virtual monopoly in the organic sector, and its easily identifiable logo has helped to disseminate awareness of the existence of certified organic foods. Several surveys during the last decade have shown that the Ø-label is familiar to the majority of Danish consumers. By 2004, 93 % of Danish citizens were acquainted with the Ø-label, and this had increased to 98 % in 2005. Furthermore, a majority of Danish consumers also trusts this label to a modest or high degree<sup>9</sup>.

The market share stagnated at about 5 % during the first years of this century (Torjusen *et al.* 2004). Increases were observed as from 2005 and by the end of 2006 the market share had increased to 6.5 % (Økologisk Landsforening 2007a). A further boom for the organic sector in Denmark was reported in 2007, the market share having risen to 7.5 % during the first quarter (Økologisk Landsforening 2007a). Among other factors, the recent boom appears to have been supported by a rising level of disposable income and by a changing pattern of distribution in the organic sector.

### ***Distribution profile***

A limited range of organic foods appeared in some Danish supermarkets during the late 1970s, but throughout the 1970s and 1980s most organic products were not sold through mainstream sales channels. Although the range of organic food products expanded during this period, they retained the status of niche products, the sale of which relied upon health food and specialty stores as well as direct distribution through market stalls, farm shops and farm gate sales.

Supermarket sales increased as from the early 1990s, following the adoption of EU regulation of organic production (EEC No 2092/91) and the initiation in Denmark of work to produce a national Action Plan for the organic sector. A campaign to promote the sale of organic products at reduced prices was launched by one of the largest supermarket chains in 1993, quickly leading to a 100 % increase in sales and closely followed by problems of insufficient supply. Other supermarket chains followed suit in the course of the 1990s, giving rise to increasing reliance upon import of organic products. By the end of the decade, 70 % of all organic food sales were made through mainstream sales channels (ITC 1999), a share that had risen to 85 % by 2007.

A distinguishing feature of the Danish organic market in recent years is that discount chains have been gaining a relatively large share of total organic sales. By the end of 2005, this share had reached 28.5%, and the ratio of discount as compared to supermarket sales is increasing. In fact one discount chain (*NETTO*) has gained, and currently holds (at 15 % in 2006), the largest share of the total organic product sales in Denmark held by any single chain (Torjusen 2004; Økologisk Landsforening 2007). It has also been noted that this mainstream market co-exists alongside a parallel market comprising direct sales channels, and largely supported by 'heavy' users of organic food products (Weir *et al.* 2005; Denver *et al.* 2007).

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<sup>8</sup> The letter 'Ø' stands for 'økologisk', the Danish term for 'organic'.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.fvm.dk/Files/Filer/Borger/Oekologi/Rapport.pdf>.

## 2. Life Histories regarding Food Habits

The main findings with regard to current food habits in three user groups ('regular', 'occasional' and 'non-users' of organic products) are outlined in section 2.1. The development of these habits is then traced back in time, highlighting changes that typically occurred in different phases of the life cycle (section 2.2) and the particular events or persons that have influenced these habits (section 2.3).

### 2.1 Current food habits

Current food habits, focussing on differences between user groups, are described with respect to meals and eating habits on the one hand and to shopping habits on the other.

#### Meals and eating habits

Almost all consumers articulate their current food habits within a conceptual framework that contrasts 'traditional' and 'modern' meals and eating habits. The traditional form of the main course of the main Danish meal comprises meat as the main ingredient (most frequently pork), served together with cooked potatoes, brown gravy and cooked vegetables. Although this kind of meal is described in various ways and a variety of somewhat different dishes<sup>10</sup> referred to, the contrast between traditional and modern meals appears to constitute a shared stock of knowledge by means of which individuals position themselves as consumers.<sup>11</sup> The contrast is especially clear when informants talk about characteristics of their favourite foods and when they describe their eating habits, preferred meals or food-related values. There are, furthermore, clear differences between the user groups.

#### *Regular users*

In general, regular users tend to reject the traditional Danish meal. This negative attitude does not necessarily regard particular ingredients, but rather the composition of the meal and to some extent the cooking methods on which it is based. Criticism was directed in particular at the assumption that meat should always be the dominant ingredient and that it should be accompanied by a serving of gravy. Also, the traditionally small quantity of vegetables served is criticised. The traditional Danish meal was seen as being unhealthy, and among some regular users it is also associated with dull and boring food. One regular user made the following comment, when contrasting the meals served during her childhood with her current habits:

*We had the most boring food a Dane can possibly get – gravy, potatoes and meat every day of the week, and my mother was never fond of cooking. So, we had very traditional, boring food. (Regular user F)*

The aspect of their own current eating habits typically stressed by regular users is the presence of a variety of vegetables and fruits. Quite apart from the sensory pleasures associated with eating fruit and vegetables, these items are clearly seen as having nutritional characteristics that are important for health reasons. Despite differences in age, household composition, meal routines and food preferences, the disposition to include vegetables in meals and to consume fruit as snacks emerge as distinguishing features of the eating habits of regular users. In regard to this and several other characteristics of their

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<sup>10</sup> Reference was frequently made to dishes described by the main ingredient: minced pork meatballs, pork chops or roast pork, although many other dishes were also described as 'traditional' insofar as they retained the composition of the traditional Danish meal.

<sup>11</sup> Different wordings, signifying the same contrast, were used by informants, e.g. "traditional", "old fashioned" "ordinary" and "Danish", as contrasted with "modern", "newer", "varied" or "foreign" foods.

particular diets, the pursuit and maintenance of good health is a prevalent feature of accounts of food habits in this user group.

*[At my workplace they serve]... a classical Danish lunch buffet – everything from smoked salmon to minced beef-burgers and' skipperlapskovs – old-fashioned things combined with something a bit more modern. You can get deep fried fish fillets with remoulade sauce, five different kinds of marinated herring, sliced luncheon meats and cheese. Well, I try to stick to salads and fish and to avoid all those fatty foods. (Regular user H)*

I [interviewer]: *How would you describe the eating habits you have at the moment?*

R [respondent]: *I'd say they were fairly good! I certainly try hard to live up to the [dietary] recommendations at any rate... If food is going to be good food, then it has to be healthy food and live up to those – masses of vegetables and fruit, and not too much fat. (Regular user C)*

When talking about their current and former food habits, the members of this group spontaneously and relatively frequently refer to the place of organic foods in their experiences, preferences and values. The tendency to raise this topic, without any prompting on the part of the interviewer, indicates that organic foods have an important place in the food habits and orientations of regular users, a pattern that is not found among the members of other user groups.

### ***Occasional users***

This is a rather heterogeneous group with regard to eating habits and the characteristic features of their food preferences. One subgroup shares their conceptual universe and habits with regular users, as described in the previous section. That is to say, they tend to reject traditional meals, stress healthy eating habits and the importance of fruit and vegetables in their meals.

The distinguishing feature of the other subgroup of occasional users is a strong orientation towards the sensory pleasures of eating, to the virtual exclusion of other food-related concerns. In these ways, this subgroup shares their conceptual universe, hedonistic orientation and habits with non-users (described in more detail in the following section). The clear difference between these subgroups is relevant to keep in mind with regard to assessing the likely development of future consumption patterns with respect to organic products among occasional users. Since we shall return to this issue, we will designate these two subgroups as 'health-oriented' and 'taste-oriented' occasional users, respectively.

Few occasional users spontaneously raise the topic of organic foods in their narratives about eating habits, food characteristics and preferences. Those that do so, only mention organic products in the context of talking about products that are not of interest to them. Awareness of organic foods as a possible feature of everyday consumption habits thus appears to be very much less prevalent among occasional users as compared with regular users.

### ***Non-users***

In contrast to regular users and some occasional users, most non-users do not reject the traditional meal or its nutritional characteristics. Rather, they tend to view traditional meals as being much tastier than more modern meals.

*Well, it tastes so nice! If you get a good piece of minced pork and some nice potatoes with that, then you can get some green beans with that and gravy – now that is something that tastes nice. (Non-user A)*

In general, the characteristics that are stressed in regard to food concern the sensory pleasures of eating. This is not to say that the other user groups do not talk about similar sensory pleasures, but that non-users only stress these aspects to the exclusion of other aspects. This user group is characterised by a hedonistic orientation to meals and eating habits, and health considerations do not appear to play any role in their conceptual universe with respect to food. This aspect is stated quite explicitly by non-users.

*I: How about the health aspect – is that something that you consider?*

*R: No.*

*I: It should be good – is that the way it is?*

*R: It should be good, yes. But I don't give a thought to how much fat there is in it. (Non user D)*

At a more practical level, non-users also mix traditional dishes with newer ingredients, such as fresh vegetables, foreign (more exotic) products and newer cooking techniques. In this sense, more modern food habits also reign among non users. However, the marked difference between non-users and hedonistically oriented occasional users, as compared to regular users, lies in the reasons for supplementing a meal with items, which the regular user would describe as having nutritional benefit. Both non-users and taste-oriented occasional users explain their consumption of vegetables and fruit, for example, as solely related to taste preferences. It is because of the taste sensation that these items are (if they are) consumed regularly. This pattern is illustrated in the following exchange with one occasional user:

*I: A lot of people like to eat green salads because they are healthy.*

*R: Yes, but we eat salad because it tastes nice.*

*Husband: That has no influence around here. We don't live in a particularly healthy way.*

*R: No, I wouldn't say that we do. In fact we don't.*

*I: Why is that?*

*R: We don't live for the sake of things being healthy. (Occasional user D)*

## Shopping habits

Organic products carry a premium price. Since this factor may present an obstacle to increasing demand and to the relative level of loyalty in different user groups, it is particularly relevant in the present context to explore differences regarding shopping habits among the user groups under consideration here.

A distinction can be made between consumers who are strongly oriented towards quality<sup>12</sup> and those who exhibit a distinctly thrifty<sup>13</sup> orientation in their shopping habits. Each of these orientations is in turn clearly associated with different strategies regarding the choice of shopping venues. This distinction cuts right through user groups, the same difference being found in each of the three user groups.

### Regular users

There are two notably different shopping orientations among regular users. One subgroup of regular users has distinctly *quality* orientated shopping habits. They repeatedly (and from different perspectives) stress that their main concern is that of purchasing products of “good quality”, and this orientation is accompanied by deliberately choosing particular supermarkets or specialty shops that meet their needs.

*We always went for quality. A shop like ISO was a bit ahead back then, and they had lots of goods that were different from the others. (Regular user F)*

*Why always choose conventional products and focus so much on the price? If you buy conventional stuff, then you can certainly choose between three different sausages, but they are all of equally bad quality. (Regular user B)*

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<sup>12</sup> When talking about their buying behaviour all user groups stresses that food should have quality and live up to expectations in regard to taste and freshness. So the concept of ‘quality’ does not mark a significant difference at face value. The distinction is rather traced back to interwoven narratives regarding (a) cooking, taste and shopping experiences, and (b) willingness to pay more, travel further, and to expend more effort, etc. in order to purchase goods of the desired quality.

<sup>13</sup> The term ‘thrifty’ refers to narratives/observations in which willingness to pay, use of time (reading ads) and effort expended (visiting several supermarkets/shops) are designed to achieve the goals of saving money, getting the cheapest price or getting value for money.

The shopping environment is also of aesthetic importance to this subgroup:

*I like going into specialty shops...everything isn't thrown at you. I get to choose myself... [discount shops] are a bit un-aesthetic. (Regular user F)*

The other subgroup of regular users has thrifty buying habits. This is not to say that this group does not also stress their interest in the quality of products. But the pursuit of quality is interwoven into an overriding concern to obtain value for money. Again, this orientation is also accompanied by a particular preference with respect to shopping venues. Discount supermarkets are the main retailers selected by this subgroup of regular users. In some cases, but by no means all, this thrifty orientation can be related to limited economic resources in the household. According to their own account, the members of this subgroup often surf through the weekly ads searching for the best deals and will choose the store they will visit in light of this.

*R: I can get three packets of coffee for 75 or 80 kroner – but I'm not sure when it starts, because I only got it yesterday.*

*I: What was that you got?*

*R: It was the NETTO ads [a weekly paper, distributed free of charge, featuring food advertisements and reduced prices on special offers]*

*I: And you take a look through this paper now and then, or...?*

*R: I go through it every week – because I usually shop down there, either in NETTO or BRUGSEN. If they don't have what I need in NETTO, then I go on to BRUGSEN. (Regular user A)*

Some of these regular users also systematically pick out several discount stores in which different products will be bought. That is, they know exactly which products they intend to buy and are cheaper in one store as compared to others.

*[After moving to a new house] I thought it was nice to go down [to the local shops] and find out where it was cheapest. He [her husband] just went to the local shop that was nearest. But I would travel further to get something that was cheaper. (Regular user D)*

### ***Occasional and non-users***

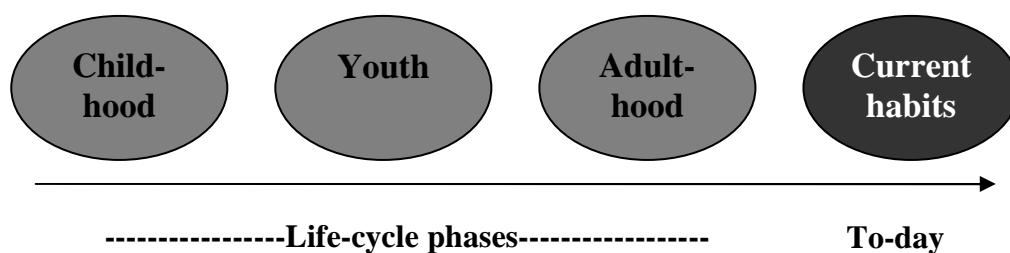
Precisely the same difference between 'quality oriented' and 'thrifty' shopping habits was identified among both occasional users and non-users. Contrary to expectation, it did not emerge that one user group is distinctly more oriented towards shopping in discount stores than are other groups. The fact that both orientations are represented among regular as well as occasional users of organic products in the Danish context has implications for other aspects of this analysis. We will return to this issue in Chapter 4.

## **2.2 Changes in food habits**

The life stories described by informants are analysed as comprising three phases, and patterns regarding changes in the food habits that are characteristic of each phase are briefly described. In all cases except those of younger informants, for whom there was no distinction between the phase of 'adulthood' and the current phase of the life cycle, all three phases are understood as referring to earlier experiences, habits and concerns, particularly as related to the theme of food.

### ***Life-cycle phases***

For most informants, memories of the food habits of *childhood* play a role in their self-understanding and their accounts of current orientations towards food. Typically, eating and shopping habits are either explicitly related to experiences and influences from childhood or are indirectly related as recollections of



**Fig. 1: Life-cycle phases distinguished for the purpose of analysis**

feelings, tastes, preferences and internalized norms or ideals regarding the “right” way to behave.<sup>14</sup> Thus, many influences on food habits and on the kinds of changes made with regard to these habits can be traced to childhood experiences and parental influences. However, some central themes crop up again and again in these narratives – with particular reference to health on the one hand and to traditional Danish foods on the other.

The *youth phase* is described by many as a stage in life in which indifference to food was particularly marked. Some life stories also reveal that the food preferences of childhood had been rejected during this phase or that more stable eating habits had been abandoned. This phase is often described as contrasting with the more responsible or the more sensually satisfying habits that became established (or were expected to become established) in later adult life.

The phase or phases of *adulthood* generally marks the period in life in which routines, regularity and personal values in relation to food are first established, and this phase is often contrasted with the earlier youth phase. Some informants describe *adulthood* as comprising a single phase of life, characterised by a distinct set of food habits, while others describe two or more significant events or persons that influenced and served to change their food habits.

When analyzing changes in the food habits of user groups, differences between groups regarding the extent to which an orientation towards health plays a part in these narratives is very marked. The findings presented earlier on this point in regard to current habits are no less clear in narratives regarding changes in food habits over time, and will be considered in more detail in the following section.

Briefly, regular users are strongly disposed to regard health as a central criterion in their assessments of food products, meal composition and diet, also in retrospective descriptions of their earlier habits. Furthermore, when regular users speak about food choices and changes in habits, a preoccupation with health emerges as the only theme common to all members of this group. We will analyse this theme more closely with regard to concrete influences on changing food habits.

As noted earlier, occasional users are an internally differentiated group with regard to their orientation towards health. This is also the case with regard to the role of health concerns in their changing food habits. The influences on changing habits with respect to the issue of healthy foods will be examined further. We will also examine the tendency among ‘taste-oriented’ occasional users (and non users) to renounce traditional foods, while in fact having maintained broadly similar food habits through their life course.

Concerns with health or healthy foods are not stressed by non-users in their accounts of changes in food habits. More specifically, older non-users tend to stress the continuation of a preference for traditional foods, as learned, felt and remembered from childhood, into adult life and current habits. Whereas younger non-users (alongside ‘taste-oriented’ occasional users) distance themselves from specific traditional recipes and products, some of which feature in their descriptions of childhood, they actually maintain a preference for traditional foods in their current eating habits

<sup>14</sup> Much research relates the habitual orientations and lifestyles of individuals to influences from their childhood (e.g. Bourdieu 1984).

## 2.3 Influences on changing food habits

Changes in phases of the life cycle are often related to changes in food habits among the members of all user groups. However, some dominant themes also remain unchanged in many life stories. One marked difference between user groups regards the extent to which health concerns have played a role in considering and undertaking planned changes in food habits. Another difference concerns responses to the traditional food habits of childhood that were adopted, often implicitly, in later life.

### *Regular users*

For one subgroup of regular users, an interest in health and healthy eating habits does not represent a change that has occurred during their life course. Rather, it is presented as a continuation of concerns and eating practices that had been internalized during childhood. For this subgroup, parents (most often mothers) are described as having been very health oriented, and there is also a tendency to characterize youthful food habits as having been relatively steady, “sensible” or healthy. Other current orientations that appear to be strongly rooted in childhood experiences are the tendencies noted earlier to be oriented towards quality concerns on the one hand or towards thriftiness on the other with regard to food shopping habits. There were some few exceptions to this. In one case (regular user B) in which a substantial boost in disposable income had occurred, for example, the shopping orientation had shifted character towards a more quality oriented pattern.

An age-related difference is clearly at play in regard to regular consumers’ descriptions of childhood influences upon health concerns. Those who report an interest in health as having been influenced by their mothers are for the most part relatively young informants. Relatively older informants, although also strongly concerned about healthy eating habits, did not describe their childhood home as having influenced these concerns. For this subgroup an interest in health had first arisen during adult life, had sometimes profoundly changed their approach to food, and is described somewhat vaguely as being “a sign of the times”, as illustrated in the following response:

*I would say it was like...well, it just belonged to those times, you know what I mean? That, well...yes, perhaps it was just part of our milieu. I don't really know. (Regular user F)*

Sometimes contact with alternative or even metaphysical philosophies had served to introduce these relatively older regular users to healthy foods or theories about healthy diets.

*I: Why was it so important to you that there were no poisonous elements in it [the food]?*

*R: That was because I had begun to get involved in alternative ideas. That was also during the period when I was studying at the Training College, and I was getting trained in reflexology at the same time. So I was very involved in the alternative world at that time. (Regular user E)*

Interestingly enough, for both of the older regular consumers who had been strongly influenced by the dietary theories of alternative philosophies (including anthroposophy, the philosophy associated with biodynamic farming), these theories were later abandoned or even renounced – but the new interest that had arisen with respect to healthy foods and eating habits was retained<sup>15</sup>.

These two cases also illustrate the fact influences on food habits arise through social networks and sometimes through educational institutions. Often, but not exclusively, a network and place of education had jointly influenced the consumer. The following regular user mentioned these influences with respect to the discussion of organic foods and their benefits to health:

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<sup>15</sup> These cases refer to: Regular user F and Regular user E. The difference in influences with regard to age-groups nevertheless suggests that primary channels of influence have changed character over time (see Section 5.1).

I remember one time [at the School of Nursing] we were sitting there talking about what was in our food and what we were putting into our bodies. They were very involved in that. Well, I'd say that it was that, that affected me in the end. There are all the things you hear – plus all the stuff you read your way to. (*Regular user A*)

Some regular users expressed the view that the establishment of a family (partner and children) marks a point in life at which healthy eating habits should become part of an everyday routine. However, this view does not account for the healthy eating habits of these consumers, since most of them described their childhood as having been health-oriented, a pattern that continued into early adulthood. They had already established a healthy style of living at the time when their first child was born. However, it does appear that the establishment of a family does mark a point in time at which regular users were especially inclined to review their style of life, including eating habits, or when an earlier decision to pursue a healthy style of life was reinforced due to concerns about the needs of a small child or children.

Other more concrete reasons for taking up a healthy lifestyle had arisen in the context of a particular incident in which a member of the family had been diagnosed with a chronic illness or allergy, or when the consumption of traditional dishes and fatty foods had led to a serious gain in body weight. However, very few such incidents are reported.

There is a very close connection between the focus on healthy foods and on organic foods in the life stories of all regular users. Although not explicated directly in all narratives, it would seem to be quite clear that the original interest in organic foods was primarily related to a prior interest in healthy foods and eating habits. In contrast, only two life stories among regular users featured an interest in the problems of animal welfare, which also constituted a reason for subsequently developing an interest in organic foods. The place of organic foods in the life stories of consumers will be analysed in more detail in Chapter 5. Here, we will merely illustrate one of the ways in which a link between health and organic foods emerged in the course of a longer exchange with the interviewer. In this instance, an interest in 'health foods' had merged into an interest in organic foods:

I: *What habits were those [which had been influenced by the informant's mother]?*

R: *That you need to think about whether food is healthy. It's not enough that it tastes good.*

I: *You said that you wouldn't call it 'health foods' these days [the term she had applied to her mother's food]?*

R: *No, I wouldn't.*

I: *So, what would you be inclined to call it? What would you call it these days when one eats in a really healthy way?*

R: *I don't know. I can hear that I keep talking about how healthy it has to be, but the way I think about it is more along the lines that it should be really nice food and have a good quality – the things that taste really good are in fact healthy, and that bad food is also unhealthy food – a kind of cardboard food.*

I: *What is cardboard food?*

R: *Well, it's frozen pizza, powdered soup and that kind of thing.*

I: *And they are not healthy things?*

R: *No! They're full of additives and if there has ever been any real food in them then it has certainly been destroyed.*

I: *So, you avoid additives then?*

R: *Yes, whenever I possibly can. But then it's so easy – because, if you buy organic things, then it's pure food without all those things in it. There are very strict limits on what they are allowed to add to it. You don't even need to read the labels on the products.*

I: *So on that point you put your trust in the organic label?*

R: *Yes, I certainly do. (Regular user B)*

### ***Occasional users and non-users***

The subgroup of 'health-oriented' occasional users is relatively small and differs with regard to both socio-demographic characteristics and factors that had influenced the development of healthy eating habits. No clear pattern distinguishes this subgroup from regular users, insofar as similar themes were raised in the life stories of both groups.

With regard to non-users and the ‘taste-oriented’ subgroup of occasional users who have a preference for traditional foods, there is a notable difference with regard to age. Older consumers retain a preference for particular traditional recipes and for the cooking methods that had been used in the homes of their childhood:

*Yes, well of course we got a lot of that at home when I was a child. But when I make pork meat balls, I also mix the meat with full fat milk, salt and pepper. I don’t put garlic or all other kinds of fancy things into it – it’s a proper traditional meat ball. (Non user A)*

*I: What kind of dishes did you have back then [in childhood home]?*

*R: Yes, well, it was all those things from the old days. There were roasts and, let me see, pot-roasted things – done in the pot – you know? I mean, not in the oven, but in a pot, old-fashioned braised beef and soup and that kind of thing. They were the good old-fashioned things, as I see it, and which I still think have the most marvellous taste. (Occasional user D)*

The younger age-group also describe the foods of their childhood as having been “traditional”. In contrast to older consumers, however, they tend to distance themselves from the particular dishes that had been served at that time and from traditional styles of cooking. Their descriptions of eating habits later on in life reveal, however, that they had retained many traditional features, particularly with regard to the choice of foods and the composition of meals. Differences between the meals of childhood and later life lie, for example, in the kind of gravy or sauce that is used, and not in the issue as to whether it should be there at all. It also lies in the way potatoes or vegetables are prepared (boiled in water), and not whether they should comprise part of a main meal. Another notable difference as compared with regular users lies in the pattern whereby fruit and vegetables are never mentioned in the contexts of describing “newer”, “modern” or “healthy” foods.

It would seem that changes in food supply and cuisine, including the introduction of recipes and products from other lands as well as a wide variety of exotic spices and fruits, had presented ‘taste-oriented’ occasional users and non-users with a challenge. Older consumers appear to have responded to this by seeking to ensure a sense of continuation between the foods of their childhood and later life. Younger consumers on the other hand had changed their food habits in the form of a critical reaction to the recipes of their childhood, while retaining the composition of traditional Danish meals.

## **2.4 Conclusion: The food habits of regular consumers of organic food as compared with occasional and non-users**

The most important findings regarding changes in the food habits of consumers concern: (1) differences between regular users of organic foods and other consumers with respect to their orientation towards healthy foods and eating habits, and not least a tendency to have developed an interest in organic foods on the background of this orientation towards health; (2) differences within all user groups with respect to shopping habits that are either strongly oriented towards quality (in the sense that priority is not given to the idea of saving money when food choice is at issue) or strongly oriented towards the ideal of thrifty shopping practices.

An interest in health and an interest in organic foods appear to be very closely associated in the minds of regular consumers. This association will be explored further in the next chapter. Here it can be noted that the life stories of regular users clearly indicate that reasons why organic food products are chosen and integrated into shopping habits appear to be strongly related to the perception of organic foods as being healthier. It would seem therefore that a strong reason for embarking on an organic purchasing career is related to personal (or family-related) health considerations. This conclusion is supported by the fact that while the life stories of all regular users stressed the importance of healthy eating habits, this

theme arose only in a minority of other consumers' stories. As we have seen, only one subgroup of occasional users expressed an interest in healthy eating habits, and tended to relate organic foods to health. We will later return to the issue of why this 'health-oriented' subgroup did not purchase organic foods with greater frequency, when we consider the character of resistance to purchasing these products and barriers in this regard (see sections 3.2 and 4.3).

Shopping habits among regular users differed. One subgroup had quality oriented shopping habits (and reported a tendency to frequent upmarket supermarkets and specialty shops), while the other subgroup had a thrifty shopping orientation in their selection of venues and products. A similar distinction was found among occasional users and non-users. These patterns will be considered further in Chapter 4 with specific regard to the purchase of organic food products.

### 3. Mind sets with regard to Organic Consumption

In this chapter we will take a closer look at the conceptual universe of regular users of organic foods as compared to other user groups (Section 3.1). Following Gardner (2004), we will then explore the ‘levers’ underlying the development of a change of mind with respect to this consumption pattern, focussing on *reasons*, *research*, *rewards*, *resonances* and *real world events*, as compared to *resistances* (Section 3.2). Finally, we explore the extent to which consumers try to influence other people’s minds with respect to the consumption of organic foods (Section 3.3).

#### 3.1 Thinking about organic foods

In describing differences between consumers with regard to their ways of thinking about organic foods, we distinguish between concepts of and theories about organic production on the one hand (*reasons*), and ways of conceiving and assessing the benefits that accrue to the consumption of organic products on the other (*rewards*). This distinction is important since, with few exceptions in the case of non-users, all user groups tend to think of organic foods as being the products of a form of agriculture in which pesticides are not used and this defining characteristic of organic production is associated with a claim to the effect that organic products are healthier. Views on these points are relatively homogenous. However, the three user groups differ markedly with regard to their assessments of the benefits that actually accrue to organic production and consumption, both with regard to health and other issues. These assessments also reflect differences regarding the extent to which user groups are informed about the character of organic production. In Gardner’s terms, it can be said that marked differences between user groups reflect the extent to which *research* has been undertaken, the extent to which *rewards* are conceived as accruing to the consumption of its products, and the extent to which *resistances* to this idea are put forward. The points on which consumers differ regard:

- A ‘*personal care*’ perspective, i.e. conceptions of personal benefits related to the consumption of organic products, such as being good for one’s health, having a better taste or a better quality in general
- An ‘*external care*’ perspective, i.e. conceptions of benefits to the environment or benefits related to animal welfare and other ethical issues
- A *trust* perspective, i.e. whether or not it is believed that production methods accord in practice with regulations or that certification of products is not fraudulent.

##### *Concepts, reasons and rewards among regular users*

Regular users, as compared to other user groups, have relatively more detailed knowledge about organic productions methods. Apart from mentioning the prohibition against the use of synthetic pesticides in organic production, most regular users also mention the prohibition against the use of genetically modified organisms and regulations regarding the use of fewer additives in processed organic products. Some, but not all, point out that the use of antibiotics to enhance rapid growth is not allowed in organic husbandry, and that animals are given organic feed. A focus upon animal welfare as a characteristic of organic production is also mentioned relatively often by regular users. The aspects emphasised regard the extent to which production methods tend to stress farm animals and whether animals have access to outdoor spaces that accord with their natural needs.

Regular users assess the benefits of organic production from the dual perspective of ‘personal’ and ‘external’ care. When recounting distinguishing features of organic production and products and when talking about the benefits they associate with these, these features are not put in

question. Reasons why such differences and benefits might not be trusted do not arise in their accounts. Rather, regular users tend to take them for granted.

The clearest association between organic production and benefits with respect to ‘personal care’ is made with regard to health. All regular users also associate organic foods with a better taste. Reasons why organic production methods should yield products that are healthier and have a superior taste are not usually explicated, and tend to be taken for granted. When prompted to tell more, the reasons given most often refer to the absence of residues and additives with respect to health. With regard to both health and taste, reasons given refer to slower growth conditions (vegetables), better care of animals, better nutrients providing more vigour to the products, or more careful or natural craft techniques undertaken by small manufacturing enterprises when processing organic products.

From the perspective of ‘external care’, all regular users also assess the benefits of organic production in positive ways. Organic production methods are associated with the need to promote the sustainability of the environment. Among those regular users who do not mention or stress this aspect, emphasis is placed on better animal welfare as a perceived benefit of organic production. Thus, regular users have positive assessments of organic production methods from the perspective of ‘external care’, and most also emphasise that environmental considerations and ethical considerations with respect to the treatment of animals both play an important role in their motivation to purchase organic foods.

However, it should be noted that there are quite clear differences regarding the extent to which ‘external care’ perspectives are stressed in consumer narratives as *reasons* and *rewards* for buying organic foods. Some merely mention such aspects in passing, making it clear that health is a more important personal consideration. One such comment with respect to animal welfare was as follows:

*I think it [organic meat] tastes better. And I believe the animals are given a better treatment as well. Now that's an important consideration – although I'm sure that most farmers are conscientious about their animals. Except those with pig farms – I don't care for that one bit. But that is not the most important consideration for me. As far as that goes, I am also – well, I'd say we humans are also – inclined to be beasts of prey. (Regular user E)*

For others, however, the perspective of ‘external care’ is all-important, and ethical considerations are integrated into their general consumption habits and value orientation. These play a major role in their conceptual understanding and assessment of the values and benefits of organic production and also extend to other areas of consumption than that of food. This position is illustrated by the following exchange with one of these regular users:

*R: I also do my banking in an organic bank. We haven't talked about that.*

*I: No, indeed. What is that exactly?*

*R: It's Merkur Co-operative Bank. They invest in organic projects, so that you can be sure your money is being used for – well, for instance, they've started kindergartens and schools [in underdeveloped countries]... I got fed up with Nordea Bank and all their fees and obscure transactions. I have some pension funds, and I couldn't really see what they were being invested in. These days you have the right to choose, but you couldn't do that earlier. Then I found out that they were investing in that American – what's it called? Well, it's something to do with the weapon industry anyway. (Regular user F)*

These regular users distinguish themselves from others by their strong views on aspects of ‘external care’, including their focus on ethical issues. Differences between this subgroup and other regular users encompass many aspects of consumption as well as the character of their loyalty to organic food products. We have encountered this subgroup earlier when distinguishing ‘quality oriented’ shopping habits among regular users – as compared to ‘thrifty’ habits (see Chapter 2, section 2.1). Differences between these subgroups are described more fully in section 3.3 and in chapter 4. In

order to clearly distinguish this subgroup from other regular users they will be referred to as *dedicated* regular users<sup>16</sup>.

The common characteristics of all regular users are that both ‘personal care’ and ‘external care’ are acknowledged as benefits of consuming organic foods. They feel personally rewarded in terms of obtaining products that taste better, are healthier, better for the environment and for animal welfare, and they tend to be convinced that it is worthwhile to pay a premium price for these products

### ***Concepts, reasons, rewards and resistances among occasional users***

Occasional users resemble regular users with regard to their conception of basic aspects of organic production. All define organic production methods as agricultural practices in which pesticides are not used. ‘Health-oriented’ occasional users also associate organic farming with better animal welfare and with less use of medicine, and are also aware of claims to the effect that organic production is more environmentally friendly, while these aspects are not mentioned by the other (‘taste-oriented’) subgroup of occasional users.

There are marked differences between occasional users with regard to their assessments of organic production and organic products. The ‘health-oriented’ subgroup tends to trust organic producers and to accept that their production methods may have some benefits for the environment, for the welfare of animals and for human health. However, they do not have a generalized conviction that organic products have superior quality characteristics as compared to conventional products, and they are only prepared to acknowledge a difference in taste with respect to some brands within specific product categories. Their assessment of taste is not generalized to encompass a wider range of product categories, as is the case among regular users.

The ‘taste-oriented’ subgroup tends to distrust organic producers. That is, they are far from convinced that all producers comply with regulations for organic production. At the same time, this subgroup is not convinced that the consumption of certified organic products yields any benefits to personal health. Likewise, they are not inclined to acknowledge quality differences or differences in taste between organic and conventional product variants.

The relatively higher price of organic variants is a factor stressed by occasional users in both subgroups, often assessed in relation to the perceived quality of organic products and given as a reason for not being willing to buy these products. Stories about stale, uninviting produce, smaller variants and rotten organic products are relatively frequently recounted by this user group. It is clear that among ‘health-oriented’ occasional users, the premium price on organic products tends to restrain interest in consuming these products, not least because the quality and taste of these products are not generally seen as compensating for their price.

‘Taste-oriented’ occasional users do not have any general conviction that organic foods have a better taste or quality, they have little reason as general rule to consider paying higher prices for organic products.

### ***Concepts and resistances among non-users***

At the level of definition, non-users also tend to conceive organic products as comprising distinct production methods that exclude the use of pesticides. Apart from this aspect, there is little knowledge about organic production among the members of this user group. Possible benefits to health or to the environment are only mentioned occasionally. Sometimes the principles behind organic production methods are misconceived or the claims made on behalf of organic products are seen as being spurious. One non-user, for example, raises the following issues:

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<sup>16</sup> See Table B in appendix 1 in which the main differences between *dedicated* regular users and other regular users are outlined.

*Take milk – organic milk – well, of course the cow has to be organic, and it has to be given organic feed, for example. Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to call it organic. Now, is it also bred from another organic cow, for example – before we can really call it organic? And then, does it have organic genes? That's the point where I turn around and say: just how far do we have to go before anything is really organic at all? (Non user C)*

A very prevalent view among non-users is that organic production, and thus also its products, is a fraud. Either organic producers are perceived as cheats or the certification authority is perceived to be too weak, rendering the purchase of organic products an absurdity in either case.

*We had that big wave of organic stuff. Well, I thought, well, there's just so much of this suddenly. And one says – well, at least I think a lot about this – some of this stuff just has to be a swindle. (Non user C)*

Furthermore, some non-users believe that purchasing organic foods is no more than a temporary fashion trend, possibly associated with a need for personal prestige. Non-users are strongly oriented towards hedonistic values related to food consumption (see Section 2.1), and therefore tend to assess organic products exclusively in terms of their sensory characteristics. However, the members of this group had not had sensational, or even satisfactory, experiences with the taste of organic products that might otherwise have given rise to considerations regarding idea of paying a higher price for these products.

### 3.2 Changing minds about organic foods

The focus in this section is upon ways in which consumers account for having changed their minds and habits with respect to the consumption of organic foods. We will examine the character of the original motivation to purchase organic products and the reasons given as to why consumption patterns tend to have changed over time. Our analysis of this development has indicated the need to distinguish consumer conceptions of *rewards* on the one hand and of *real world events* on the other.

Different kinds of *rewards* as we have seen in the previous section are at issue here, and these reflect different kinds of *research* undertaken by consumers. Some rewards refer to positive generic concepts associated with benefits of organic production methods and products, including better animal welfare and more sustainable production, as well as benefits to human health. Although Gardner's term *research* might seem to be a somewhat odd term to apply to the task of gathering information about these issues, we have nevertheless seen that consumers are in possession of different levels of information about organic production methods (section 3.1). In accounting for their changes of mind and habits, however, it becomes very clear that a further process of information-gathering (*research*) also underlies consumer assessments of organic products. This information is gathered from concrete experiences: looking at organic products on display in shops, comparing them to other products on display, purchasing, preparing and tasting them, and assessing them as compared to familiar foods in the household. This is the kind of research that underlies conceptions of differences in quality and taste as benefits of organic products. We distinguish these kinds of research and the benefits associated with each by referring to *value-based rewards* on the one hand and *experience-based rewards* on the other. The former include the perspectives of both 'external care' (environmental and ethical issues) and 'personal care' (health), as outlined in the previous section. The latter include only the perspective of 'personal care' with particular reference to quality and taste. These and other 'levers' related to the consumption of organic foods are graphically presented in Figure 3.

Not all consumers acknowledge such rewards and among those who do, acknowledgement is presented with varying degrees of conviction and feeling. In Gardner's terms, such differences refer to differences in the emotional *resonances* underlying the ways in which we think and act. Among those who do not, it is clear that a number of factors constitute barriers to the acknowledgment of any such rewards. Barriers of this kind are termed *resistances* by Gardner.

	REWARDS:	RESISTANCES:	REAL WORLD EVENTS:
<p><b>TRUST/MISTRUST</b></p> <p>↑ ↓</p> <p><b>RESEARCH</b></p>	<i>Value-based (trust/research):</i>		
	<b>Health issues</b> <b>Environmental issues</b> <b>Ethical issues</b> - Animal welfare - Other issues	<b>Fraud</b>	<b>Food scandals</b>
	<i>Experienced-based ( trust/ research):</i>		
	<b>Better quality</b>  <b>Better taste</b>	<b>Premium prices</b>  <b>Poorer quality</b>  <b>Poorer taste</b> <b>Smaller sizes</b> <b>Shorter shelf-life</b>	<b>Availability</b>  <b>Lower premium prices</b>  <b>Improved quality</b>
	<b>No rewards</b>	↔	<b>Mistrust</b>

**Diagram 3: Rewards, resistances and real world events associated with levels of consumption in user groups**

*Real world events* in the present context refer to all and any events in the fields of food production, distribution and consumption as perceived by user groups, but particularly to changes that are perceived as having taken place in the market for organic products. These include such factors as the range of products available on the market and the range available in one supermarket chain as compared to another, the general quality level and price level of organic products as compared to others, as well as product-specific characteristics such as the price, appearance, relative freshness and other qualities of one particular product as compared to others.

All regular users incorporate references to both *rewards* and *real world events* in their accounts of the process whereby they have increasingly consumed organic foods. These accounts make it clear that there is a very close interplay indeed between the development of conceptions of *experience-based rewards* and the development of changes in the market for these products (*real world events*). We will look more closely at this interplay in presenting our findings with regard to changes of mind and habits in different user groups. However, one last point regarding the distinction between *value-based* and *experience-based rewards* remains to be clarified before proceeding to our analysis.

*Value-based rewards* are ‘generic’ or ‘context-free’ in the sense that they apparently operate independently of particular assessments of specific products, such as might arise in the contexts of shopping, cooking or eating a meal. These rewards are not necessarily linked to the individual’s actual shopping habits. They are convictions held – ideals that are sometimes expressed in deeply emotional ways. In some cases, they appear to play a central role in the development of regular shopping habits with respect to organic foods, while the same set of convictions in other cases do not appear to influence purchasing decisions to any notable extent. The perception of *experience-based* rewards seems to have a quite different character. The experiences at issue take place in particular contexts of shopping, preparing

food, enjoying meals and snacks and sharing assessments with other participants in these events. These events (*research*) take place over time and the assessment of a better taste or quality (*rewards*) differ greatly in character and depth of conviction from one consumer to another. Some consumers generalise their positive assessments of taste and quality in a manner that refers to all organic products. These rewards are then seen as having a ‘generic’ character in the sense that they appear to be held independently of any more specific assessment, such as might be made in the context of a shop, a kitchen or at a dining table on a particular day. Other consumers, including most of the informants in the present study, do not generalise in this way. For them, an assessment of superior taste may only apply to one brand in one product category or to one or two product categories. Similarly, assessments of quality may be only partly generalised with respect to one or two product categories or they may be made in the context-dependent manner already described as constituting research with respect to the examination of experience-based rewards.

### ***Regular users: the place of value-based rewards in changes of mind***

All regular users tend to believe that consumption of organic foods contributes to better personal health.<sup>17</sup> This conviction is most frequently mentioned as the reason for starting to purchase and consume organic foods, as illustrated by the following exchanges:

I: *Why do you want to buy organic meat?*

R: *Well, I mean we already get a fair share of poison and we don't need more, do we? (Regular User E)*

I: *Why did you start buying organic foods?*

R: *Because there are pesticide residues in conventionally grown fruits and vegetables. (Regular user B)*

The importance of the healthy and ‘pure’ characteristics of organic foods, are acknowledged in all accounts of the reasons for starting to purchase organic foods on the part of regular users. In many cases, as we can see from the cited examples, the perception of such health benefits is directly linked to an acknowledgement of differences between organic production methods and other agricultural practices. Most regular users also believe that organic production is a step in the right direction with regard to the achievement of sustainable agricultural production. This is often mentioned as a motivating reason for wanting to purchase organic foods.

I: *Why do you say that it is very important for you to buy organic foods?*

R: *It is the environmental considerations, and the next generation, and the sustainability inherent in it, right? (Regular user C)*

*I also felt that that I'd done something good when I'd bought an organic product. I have supported a sensible way to produce agricultural products. (Regular user H)*

For most regular users, environmental benefits and benefit to personal health are seen as being reciprocally dependent aspects, and considerations about both themes tend to be mentioned in close connection when clarifying the reasons for buying organic food:

*I just think this is the right way to go. Both with regard to our own health and also because we should take better care of our planet - and stop pouring all those pesticides into the natural world around us. (Regular user B)*

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<sup>17</sup> This conclusion is based on two different themes that were covered in the interviews: partly the biographical stories in which regular users often mention that organic foods play an important role with regard to healthy eating habits and partly the interview theme in which users were directly prompted for reasons why they started to purchase one or more organic foods. The perceived health characteristics of organic foods appeared in both contexts.

Regular users also tend to be very unsympathetic towards industrialized methods of husbandry and to express strong emotional reactions in their accounts of animal welfare issues<sup>18</sup>. In particular, the use of battery hens in egg production is frequently given as the reason for purchasing organic eggs:

R: *When we buy them, they have to be organic. Otherwise, I won't buy any eggs at all.*

I: *Why is that?*

R: *Well, it's that picture I have in my mind of those stressed, battery hens. No thanks – it's that, and then all that penicillin or whatever it is they say they're given, you know? I have the impression that organic hens are looked after better than that. (Regular user A)*

[I have bought organic eggs] ... *ever since they came into the shops. And that was because of those poor hens – those cases, when it came out that they were tramping each other to death and pecking all the feathers off each other... (Regular user B)*

The treatment of animals destined for slaughter is mentioned less frequently. Considerations about animal welfare are among the strong *value-based* motivators that potentially encourage consumers to purchase organic foods. However, particular barriers regarding the purchase of organic meat products are also operative, and will be considered later (see section 4.3).

### ***Regular users: real world events and experience-based rewards in changes of mind and habits***

When turning to perceived *real world* events that had contributed to changes of mind and shopping habits with respect to organic foods, two quite different kinds of reasons tend to be mentioned very frequently in the accounts of regular users. These are: changes in the food supply, with specific reference to the *availability* of organic products, on the one hand and, on the other, changes in product-specific characteristics, with particular reference to *taste*, *quality* and *price*.

The availability of products is an obvious requirement if people are to purchase organic foods, such that it might seem superfluous to mention. However, one dedicated organic consumer recounted dramatic changes in the lifestyle of her family, which she and her partner had made some decades earlier in order to ensure the family's access to biodynamic foods<sup>19</sup>. All other regular users associated their initial purchases of organic foods, however, with the arrival of organic products in their usual shopping environment. Otherwise they accounted for their tendency to buy organic products with increasing frequency in the light of the increasing availability of these products over time. The following brief exchange illustrates the first of these tendencies:

I: *Why did you begin buying organic milk?*

R: *Because it was there [in the shop]. (Regular user B)*

The second tendency is apparent in the following points made by regular users:

*Well, I have only really begun to focus on organic things within the last five years, I would say – maybe it's a bit longer ago than that. I mean the supply has got much bigger year by year. Yes, it certainly has... (Regular user G)*

All regular users present their conviction that organic products taste better or “taste of more” or possesses more “quality” than their conventional counterparts. They usually mention a particular product or a few specific products (most often vegetables or milk) to back this statement up, and then usually, but not exclusively, generalize from this particular taste experience to organic foods as

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<sup>18</sup> The choice of eggs appears to be the most emotionally charged shopping decision described by our informants due to strong feelings against the use of battery production (see also section 4.1). Loyalty in this respect seems to be very strong, but it regards the issue of animal welfare first and foremost, and is not expressed as a preference for organic products or production methods by all of the consumers who choose to buy organic eggs.

<sup>19</sup> The case at issue is that of *dedicated* regular user F.

a general category. The superior taste of organic foods is mentioned as a reason for and as a reward that accrues to purchasing organic products:

*The [organic] carrots taste better. That is the most important reason [for buying them], I would say. And onions ...yes, well, it's the same reason. (Regular user E)*

*Oh yes, I also buy organic oatmeal. Well, actually I think it tastes better too. (Regular user D)*

Many regular users also link their change of mind and habits to the improved quality of organic products over time. As compared to an earlier supply situation, in which organic goods were perceived as being somewhat more dull and uninteresting than other products, they believe that producers and distributors have improved the products that now appear in shopping outlets. Thus, organic foods at the present time are generally perceived as having a better quality or at least as being as good as their conventional counterparts:

*R: It is because they are more accessible, but also because they don't look quite as peculiar as they did at the start. They looked a bit more health-food-like back then. It was a very constricted market - whereas now you can hardly see any differences at all.*

*I: Something or other has happened on the organic market?*

*R: They were forced to do something about improving the quality. People won't buy it just because it's organic. It has to be good too, and it has to be fresh. You don't buy a wrinkled cucumber just because it's organic. It has to look just as good as the ordinary one. (Regular user B)*

*I: So, do you buy more organic products now?*

*R: Yes, I do. It is because the organic products began to look a lot better as well, but also because of all those things they put in [conventional] animal feed – it is not good that. So, yes, I do buy more now. (Regular user A)*

*I: What changes would make you buy less organic products?*

*R: That would be, if the quality began to go down hill. (Regular user G)*

The latter regular user had had an unhappy experience with organic milk that had made her stop buying organic products for a period of time:

*I remember I had begun [to buy organic milk] – I can't remember what year it was... but we had a very warm summer, and it was always sour... So, I thought, ugh, that's not the thing for me anyway. (Regular user G)*

However, this user now regarded this problem as one that had been solved in the meanwhile:

*Well, it's not like that anymore. I'm not quite sure what it is they do differently now...I think that it [organic milk] was allowed to stand outside before I bought it – for too long, maybe. I don't know. These days they drive right in – these delivery trucks – they drive right in and deliver to the [cold] storage area. I don't know whether they used to do that earlier or whether they just delivered it. But these days they deliver directly from one storage container to the next. (Regular user G)*

In general, regular users are well aware that the prices of organic products are higher than conventional products. But they tend to think that price differences compensate for the better products they get for their money<sup>20</sup>. Some regular users also believe that the relative price difference between organic and conventional products has become smaller. This relative price difference is mentioned by some regular users as a direct reason for buying more organic products:

*Well, I buy a lot more now than I did earlier, but that is also because there are much more things you can get now. They are much easier to get hold of, and then they're not SO expensive anymore. (Regular user D)*

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<sup>20</sup> That is, better taste, quality and more healthy products, as well as the environmental and animal welfare benefits of these products.

A majority of the regular users mention the relative price difference as a reason for repeated purchase of particular organic products and/or for routinely looking at the available organic products:

I: *Why are all those things [in the shopping basket] organic?*

R: *They're not that much more expensive, and I hope that they're better. (Regular user E)*

Thus, for regular consumers it would seem that they tend to be positive towards organic products in general, due to both the *value-based* and *experience-based rewards* associated with these products. In practice, however, their consumption has been limited by availability and by the relative price differences between organic and conventional goods. The general tendency among all regular users is to perceive rewards as compensating (within limits) for higher prices. This is a mind changer. However, the extent to which regular users are always prepared to pay that higher price varies. Price also constitutes a major barrier for many regular users when the relative price difference between organic and conventional products seems to be too great. This aspect will be considered further in the next chapter.

### ***Occasional users: the place of value-based rewards in changes of mind***

Once again, there is a clear difference between two subgroups of occasional users. 'Health-oriented' users explicitly refer to *value-based* rewards as reasons for preferring and selecting organic products, while 'taste-oriented' occasional users do not. The former subgroup subscribe to the theory that the consumption of organic foods contributes to better personal health, and this is one reason why they wish to purchase and consume organic foods.

R: *I began to buy organic oatmeal the time I left home and that's 10 years ago.*

I: *Why was that?*

R: *Well I'd say I thought that at some level or other I should have some kind of healthy food (Occasional user B)*

In practice, however, this association between personal health and organic foods is not generalized to encompass several products. These occasional users tend to explain their narrow selection of organic food products (usually no more than one or two) by reason of the fact that the particular products at issue are especially important for their health:

I: *But I wonder why it's the [organic] oatmeal you happen to buy?*

R: *Yes, well maybe I'm one of the halfway- saved [laughs]!*

I: *What do you mean by that?*

R: *One has to have something or other that isn't full of heavy metals and pesticides and stuff like that, and I thought, well, since I eat a lot of oatmeal, that would help things in the right direction. (Occasional user B)*

*I buy the citrus fruit sometimes – I often buy lemons that are organic and haven't been sprayed. That's simply because I usually put them in my drinking water. But otherwise I don't bother... (Occasional user E)*

Some few members of this subgroup also mention environmental considerations as a reason for wanting to purchase organic products:

R: *Actually, I'd say, what it's mainly about is that I've got to the point at which I'm a bit more ready to accept the arguments for buying organic products.*

I: *Which arguments do you have in mind?*

R: *The arguments about looking after the environment. (Occasional user A)*

Even among these, however, environmental arguments can be overshadowed by benefits related to personal health:

*The advantages, I would say – I don't honestly think that I have really cottoned on to the sustainability thing. I would say that it has more to do with my own health. I don't really support that, I just do it for my*

*own sake. The idea of a sustainable society – that's not the reason why I buy organic products.*  
(Occasional user B)

'Health-oriented' occasional users also tend to be opposed to and to express strong feelings about industrialized husbandry. The topic most frequently mentioned is battery production of eggs:

*Oh, those poor battery hens... (Occasional user A)*

R: [Our] eggs are usually organic or else they're free range – they're never from battery hens. Maybe they haven't had organic feed, but we draw the line at battery eggs, and that's the important point.

I: So it has to do with animal welfare?

R: Yes, it's the welfare of the animals. (Occasional user B)

As is the case with regular users, there are also specific barriers regarding the purchase of organic meat products, which will be taken up later (see section 4.3).

No *value-based rewards* for selecting organic products are brought into the accounts of 'taste-oriented' occasional users when they explain the reasons for their purchases. Although most informants comprising this subgroup have heard about benefits that possibly accrue to the consumption of organic products, they tend to remain unconvinced by these arguments. The following example illustrates this with respect to health:

*I'm not convinced that it's SO much healthier. Actually, I think it's only a LITTLE bit healthier than the food I eat.*  
(Occasional user C)

The members of this subgroup are also inclined to distrust organic producers. They offer examples of products that carry the organic label, but which should not do so in their view. As they see it, it is not possible to draw a line between 'conventional' and 'organic' production methods for all products. Examples of this kind are sometimes used to re-describe 'organic' as being an illogical term in general or to suggest that the regulation of organic production is a fraudulent affair.

*A lot of people in Jutland seem to think it is all swindle and humbug [laughs]. Not that I think ALL of it is swindle and humbug, but there are some things I simply do not understand. 'Organic fish' and 'organic honey' – I just cannot grasp how it possible to claim that such products can be 'organic'. (Occasional user F)*

When this subgroup occasionally purchases organic products (typically only one or two) the reasons for doing so have nothing to do with their beliefs about organic production methods. At issue is a willingness to experiment with a new product in order to see how it tastes. In contrast, some value-based rewards were perceived by some members of the 'health-oriented' subgroup of occasional users.

### ***Occasional users: real world events and experience-based rewards in changes of mind and habits***

Compared to regular users, for whom the mere availability of organic products in their ordinary shopping environments triggered and then increased their purchases of organic foods, the issue of availability did not arise in the accounts of occasional users as a reason for buying organic products. While this might be expected with respect to the 'taste-oriented' subgroup, it was also the case among 'health-oriented' occasional users.

Only one occasional user (the most 'regular' user among the occasional users) acknowledged the fact that her preferred retailer had begun to stock a wider range of organic products. She did not, however, actively search for organic products in the other supermarkets she also frequents:

I: I forgot to ask you where you usually buy your organic products.

R: In the supermarket.

I: Which one?

R: Well, in NETTO – they stock a lot more organic things these days. And then in BRUGSEN – I buy them there sometimes. FØTEX... no, I've never really noticed whether they have them in FØTEX, apart from the milk. They have that... (Occasional user A)

Some occasional users have experienced a specific organic product as having a better taste than its conventional counterparts. The following example concerns a processed organic yoghurt product:

I: You mentioned that you have tried [organic] yoghurt?

R: Yes, we've bought the yogurt. It was just because it tastes nice. It is a matter of: Do I like this or do I not like it? I think that yoghurts have different tastes.

I: Is there a big difference?

R: No, not a big difference, but there IS a difference. But then I don't know whether it is a difference between ordinary yoghurt and organic yoghurt. There is a difference between the companies that make the yoghurt. It's just that I can never remember the brand names. (Occasional user F)

It is also notable, however, that even when this form of research has been undertaken and the result positively assessed as having been rewarding, these experiences do not always give rise to repeated purchases of these specific organic products. We will describe the reasons for this pattern in more detail in the section regarding barriers (see section 4.4).

Those instances in which occasional users do purchase organic products with any regularity tend to be ones in which the price difference between organic and conventional variants is perceived to be small or of little account. This factor does appear to constitute a *tipping point* with respect to a change of mind and shopping habits among occasional users:

I: So, it was just something you gradually started to do?

R: Yes, take eggs, for example, well, I don't eat many eggs. So if I pay a bit extra, it doesn't matter that much. The same goes for milk. (Occasional user A)

As we have seen earlier with respect to eggs and oatmeal, value-based considerations with respect to animal welfare and health also played a role among the 'health-oriented' subgroup of occasional users. Whether or not organic production was perceived as fraudulent, this factor was not seen as relevant to assessing the quality of organic products. The only factor that appeared to appeal to the members of the 'taste-oriented' subgroup was the distinctively better taste of a specific branded product as compared to other variants of the same product. However, organic products were also seen as being more expensive than other variants in the same product category. This group of occasional users could therefore see no reason to consider paying a higher price for an organic variant, unless specific products were assessed as having a distinctly better taste.

### **Non-users**

As we saw earlier (section 3.1) non-users do have some basic knowledge about organic production methods and its supposed benefits, but they do not acknowledge any *value-based* or *experience-based rewards* as reasons why they might change their shopping or consumption habits with respect to organic foods. Rather, they tend to view organic production as being a fraud. The only instance among them, in which any possible benefit other than taste was recounted, concerned the issue of food safety as related to health. One non-user had bought organic chicken and considered the advantages of doing so, but had become quickly convinced that there was no reason whatsoever to pursue this line of thought further:

R: What I remember best, that was the time when there was all that talk about salmonella. A lot of people talked about the fact that they [organic products] were treated in a different way, so there was less risk. It must be about 10 years ago now since that salmonella scare was all over the news.

I: So, did you try it then, at that time?

R: *I did, I tried it, but then not long after that I asked my old mother about it, and my mother told me that there was also salmonella around when she was a child. And she's 84 now. So, I thought, well, there's not much point in worrying about that [laughs]. (Non user A)*

### 3.3 Influencing others with respect to organic consumption

Trying to influence others to consider buying organic food is not a widespread practice among consumers. No such attempts are reported by occasional users with respect to their friends or acquaintances. Among regular users the picture is somewhat more mixed.

Most regular users make it very clear that they have no wish whatsoever to encourage friends or acquaintances in this regard:

I: *You say that you want to support these ideas. Does that mean that you would like to tell other people about it?*  
R: *No, I'm inclined to think that people should make up their own minds. I mean to say, you can soon seem to be a bit holier-than-thou if you go around talking about the fact that you buy organic food. (Regular user D)*

I: *Have you ever encouraged other people to try eating organic foods?*  
R: *Only in the sense that I have said that something was organic. I have mentioned that. Otherwise, no – I've never gone out on a mission about it. (Regular user E)*

These illustrations suggest that the tendency to conceive organic food practices as being “better”, healthier, more altruistic or even morally superior, may inhibit some consumers with regard to discussing their personal preference for organic foods. It can also be noted that in neither of the two cases in which friends of regular users were interviewed, had they been encouraged to purchase organic foods by the regular user in question. Thus, for one subgroup of regular users, organic consumption was viewed as being a private matter that should not be raised with friends or acquaintances. Few stories about influencing friends or acquaintances occur in the narratives of these regular users and those that do regard situations in which the topic came up for discussion and influence, in so far as it occurs, appears to be reciprocal. That is to say, conversations that feature the topic of organic food tend to reinforce similar views held by both participants in the conversation.

This restriction does not apply, however to partners and children within the family. Regular users recounted many incidents in which the topic of organic foods had been raised between members of the close family:

... *But when we are sitting here, eating, [dinner with her two teenage sons] then, like I say, I would always let them know which things are organic... (Regular user G)*

These illustrations support the finding that parents exert a strong influence on the food habits of children, not only with regard to health (see Section 2.3), but specifically as related to organic products (see also Section 5.1).

However, the subgroup of *dedicated* regular users does actively try to influence friends, acquaintances, colleagues and others with respect to the consumption of organic foods, as illustrated in the following exchange:

I: *Have you ever encouraged other people to try organic products?*  
R: *Yes, I'd certainly say that I have [laughs]. Whenever I CAN, I try to put in a good word [laughs].*  
I: *To whom?*  
R: *Friends or acquaintances – and sometimes I can get a discussion out of it. But it's so nice to run into someone, one doesn't have to argue with [laughs]. (Regular user C)*

Another had persuaded the kitchen staff at her place of work to change their procurement policy – claiming that there was no excuse these days not to do so, given the easy availability of organic foods. A

third *dedicated* regular user had encouraged her local supermarket at an earlier period in her life to increase their stock of organic products:

*That KVICKLY there – that was very good. Especially after I'd told them to pull themselves together – but that was also because they were open to the possibilities, you know what I mean? (Regular user F)*

In the light of such active attempts to influence their social environment, these *dedicated* regular users can be described as advocates of organic food in their everyday lives. It would seem that this subgroup also actively contributes to the development of the universe of possible consumption practices. That is to say, they look for new ways in which their strongly felt food values can be realized by means of their consumption practices. This includes the pursuit of ethical projects in their consumption.<sup>21</sup> One example of this was referred to earlier in which a dedicated organic consumer had transferred all her bank activities to a bank that only invests in ethically sound projects. Another is an avid reader of food magazines in which new environmentally and ethically sound projects and brands are described, who subsequently tries to integrate these ideas into her shopping routines.

The strong involvement in ethical issues on the part of this subgroup is also designed to influence producers of organic goods, and can give rise to some dilemmas. For example, considerations about the trade-off between supporting organic and fair trade products came up in the following exchange with one dedicated regular user:

*I: What is that brand of washing up liquid you bought?*

*R: It's Ånglemark. There was an article about coffee production and sustainability in Politiken [Danish newspaper] the other day. And Ånglemark got a lot of praise because of their concern to find a balance between sustainability and organic production. Just because something is organic, doesn't necessarily mean that it's sustainable... I mean, one thing is that farmers don't spray their crops, but it's another matter whether farm workers are treated properly and whether they get a fair price for their products. (Regular user B)*

Other ethical dilemmas related to the consumption of organic foods regard the issue of food miles and organic products supplied by multinational firms or by large Danish firms that enjoy a virtual monopoly status on the Danish market. One dairy company was commented on by several regular users as one that does not pay a fair price to organic dairy farmers. It should be noted that dilemmas of this kind were not only brought up by *dedicated* regular users, for whom ethical considerations play a major role in their orientation to consumption, but also by other regular users.

### **3.4 Conclusion: The mind sets of regular users of organic food as compared with occasional and non users**

Some knowledge about organic food products is relatively widespread in all user groups, although it appears to be at a minimal level among non-users. Apart from the fact that a clear majority of Danish consumers are familiar with the Danish organic Ø-label, as measured in many representative surveys (see section 1.2), the qualitative findings of this study indicate that regular and occasional users of organic products as well as non-users share some similar concepts of what organic foods are (as compared with non-organic foods). Thus, all user groups tend to relate organic foods to particular restrictions regarding their production (in particular with respect to pesticides) and many associate organic products with healthier foods.

However, there are also some clear differences between user groups with respect to their level of information. Concepts of, theories about and research undertaken with regard to organic foods are at a

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<sup>21</sup> These cases refer to regular user F and B.

much more detailed level among regular users as compared to others. Another clear difference is that there are strong resistances to accepting *reasons* and *rewards* for buying organic products among some occasional users of organic foods (the ‘taste-oriented’ subgroup) and among non-users. These *resistances* include the tendency to perceive organic producers or certification of products as being fraudulent. With regard to products, better taste is not experienced or perceived as a benefit associated with organic products, and benefits are not believed in with regard to health.

A distinguishing feature of the mind set of regular users of organic food as compared to others concerns the role of *value-based rewards* in their assessments of organic products and production methods. These include values related to personal (and family) care, in particular the perceived benefits of organic products with reference to health. They also include values beyond the household sphere, related to caring about environmental sustainability and ethical issues, including animal welfare. Convictions and feelings on these points, particularly in regard to health and animal welfare, tend to be firmly adhered to. These positive assessments appear to be generalised in the minds of regular users, in the sense that they are seen as general benefits of organic consumption, and appear to underlie the more general conviction that buying organic foods is worthwhile. Thus, it can be said that several *levers*, described by Gardner (2004) as conditions of a change of mind, (*reasons, research, resonance* and *rewards*), appear to be firmly in place in the minds of regular users.

We earlier concluded that health and considerations about healthy eating habits played a central role in the life stories of regular users (Chapter 2). In the light of the findings presented in this chapter it is now apparent that, for many regular users of organic products, their perception of the health benefits associated with these products is directly related to their understanding of advantages associated with organic production, which enables them to avoid undesirable substances in their food. It would seem that although an interest in health in many cases pre-dates an interest in organic foods, it also constitutes one reason why these products are readily perceived as being better than other products. Moreover, there are many strong indications that different *value-based rewards* associated with organic products, including environmental concerns and concerns about animal welfare, tend to reciprocally reinforce each other.

When prompted for reasons underlying a change of mind and habits, it was apparent that increasing consumption was closely related to *real world events* in the marketplace on the one hand and to positive assessments of quality and taste on the other (*experience-based rewards*). In particular, increasing availability was mentioned as a crucial factor in changes with respect to shopping habits. Other events that were commonly perceived were a drop in the level of premium prices and a general improvement in product quality. Thus, it would seem that quite concrete *real world events*, particularly regarding increased availability, have functioned as *tipping points* for a change of mind and habits among those who are currently regular users of organic food products. A *tipping point* only functions to tip a balance when *levers* are already in place. This was indeed the case, as we have shown with regard to the place of *value-based rewards* in changes of mind among regular users.

The fact that conceptual and emotional levers were already firmly present in the minds of those Danish consumers who are currently regular users of organic products, while changes in the market with regard to availability (*real world events*) constituted a tipping point with respect to increasing demand, strongly indicates that a mature level of positive awareness of organic products and production methods was already in place in the minds of these consumers.

As we have seen, not all consumers have undergone a change of mind as described among regular users. The mere availability of reasonably priced organic products underlies potential and actual interest in these products on the part of some occasional users and even ‘non-users’, particularly with regard to exploring the taste of new products. In the following chapter we will explore some of the reasons why a change of mind may or may not lead to changes in shopping habits.

## 4. Shopping habits with respect to Organic Consumption

In this chapter we describe the shopping patterns of user groups (Section 4.1), loyalty towards organic products as revealed by substitution strategies employed while shopping (Section 4.2) and by choice of shopping venues (Section 4.3). Finally, we will examine some of the barriers that limit increasing demand for organic products (Section 4.4).

### 4.1 Buying organic foods

Four typical purchasing patterns are distinguished here, and will be employed in the analysis of loyalty with respect to organic purchases presented in the following section (see section 4.2). These are:

- *Coincidental*: This is a purchasing pattern in which the consumer has no particular motivation for selecting organic products as such. An organic variant is purchased, for example, without advertizing to its organic label or when conventional variants are sold out
- *Specific product*: This is a purchasing pattern in which the consumer has a preference for the organic variant in one or two product categories, the reasons for this preference having reference to specific product characteristics that differ from one product category to another (*cf.* section 3.2)
- *Several products*: This is a pattern in which the consumer has a preference for organic variants within three or more product categories and relatively often purchases the preferred variants
- *Generalized preference*: This is a purchasing pattern in which the consumer has a preference for organic variants within a wide range of product categories and relatively often purchases these preferred variants

It will be apparent that each of these four patterns is closely linked to differences between user groups.

#### *Regular users*

Regular users are found among those who have a *generalized* preference for organic products and those who purchase *several* organic products. These distinct purchasing patterns are closely connected to differences regarding shopping orientations with regard to quality or price respectively (see Section 2.1). Thus, it is ‘quality’ orientated, *dedicated* regular users who have a generalized preference for purchasing organic products within a relatively wide range of product categories, whereas other regular users tend to have a smaller and fixed range of categories within which organic variants are regularly purchased<sup>22</sup>. As will become apparent in the following sections, there are also clear differences with regard to loyalty strategies between these subgroups.

The shopping basket among the dedicated regular users typically contains organic food products among all food categories, including vegetables, fruit, staples, eggs, dry goods, milk and all other dairy products. Meat products are usually organic, but not exclusively so.

The shopping basket among the more thrifty regular users typically contains three or four organic products. According to their reports, it is usually the same organic products that are purchased regularly within the same range of product categories.

#### *Occasional users*

Among occasional users, the ‘health-oriented’ subgroup relatively often purchases one or two *specific* organic products. The ‘taste-oriented’ subgroup has no particular preference for organic products, but describes their occasional purchases as being largely *coincidental*. That is to say, these purchases are not planned as such, but are made for example when conventional variants happen to be sold out.

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<sup>22</sup> See section 3.1 and Appendix B regarding the distinction between *dedicated* regular users and other regular users.

### ***Non-users***

Non-users by definition also constitute a group that is not explicitly motivated to purchase any organic products<sup>23</sup>. Although some are sceptical towards organic farmers, production methods and the organic label, we have found that the members of this group do occasionally make unplanned purchases of organic products. There is no evidence of antipathy towards organic products, as such. We might add that one 'non-user' in the present study was observed selecting an organic brand of milk while shopping. It transpired that he regularly purchases this product preferring it because of its taste. He had never adverted to the organic label, however, and had not been aware that the product was organic.

The four purchasing patterns distinguished here are closely related to the degree of loyalty (if any) exhibited by these consumers towards organic products. Loyalty will be analyzed at two levels. First, it is analyzed with regard to concrete product choices, as made, or considered and discussed with the interviewer. The objective of this part of our analysis is to investigate the kinds of *substitution strategies* employed in practical situations, when, for example, an intended purchase of an organic product is not possible because it is sold out. These strategies are explored in section 4.2. The second level of analysis regards choices made by a shopper prior to an actual shopping trip. Given differences between shopping outlets, particularly with regard to stock and price level, the consumer usually chooses one or more specific shopping outlet(s) in preference to others prior to embarking on a particular shopping trip. Reasons for choosing particular outlets are (or are not, as the case may be) related to loyalty towards organic food products. These aspects of loyalty are explored in section 4.3.

## **4.2 Loyalty towards organic products: Substitution strategies**

The strategies that serve as our analytical point of departure are defined as follows: (1) *Close Substitution*: the decision taken is to substitute the missing organic product with a different organic product in the same shop; (2) *Re-try*: the decision taken is to come back to *same shop* in the *near* future to search for the sought for organic product; (3) *Re-locate*: the decision taken is to look for the missing organic product in a different shop; (4) *Surrender*: the decision taken is to simply renounce the attempt to find this product without deciding to look for it in the *near* future; (5) *Treason*: the decision taken is to substitute the missing organic product with a similar but conventional (or integrated, low-calorie, etc.) variant within the same product category.

### ***Regular users***

The substitution strategies employed by regular users vary considerably in practice. At one extreme, one regular user<sup>24</sup> is willing to use a great deal of time and effort in order to purchase the particular organic variants that she has intended to buy. Several discussions with this user reveal that she will almost certainly pursue the strategies of *close substitution* or *re-location* in all cases. The *re-location* strategy is illustrated below with reference to two substitution situations that took place during a shopping trip. In the first of these instances, the specific product this person was looking for is actually present in the shop. However, the price was deemed too high and a re-location strategy was therefore employed:

R: ... it is leeks I wanted. But oh-h they cost a fortune. I think I'll get them down in EGEFELD [the organic supermarket]. It's not something I need straight away. Three for 23 kroner! That's too expensive for me. I can get them cheaper than that.

I: What do they cost in EGEFELD's?

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<sup>23</sup> A recent study finds that 13 % of all organic products sold on the Danish market are purchased by consumers, who maintain neutral or negative views of organic producers and have no positive motivation to purchase organic products as such (O'Doherty Jensen *et al.* 2008).

<sup>24</sup> This is the regular user F that has been portrayed earlier as a deviant case (see section 3.2).

R: *I don't know, but it would be cheaper than that, and then it is not as though I need them straight away.*  
 I: *How about taking the ordinary leeks over there?*  
 R: *No, and certainly not when I don't even need to use them today.*  
 I: *Would you consider it, if you needed to use them this evening?*  
 R: *No, no, I'd need to be in a terrible rush if I didn't have time to cycle down there. Otherwise I would have ended up taking these here [the expensive organic leeks] – if I needed to make a leek quiche this evening for instance.*

This regular user would also choose a *close substitution* strategy in other situations, as illustrated by a hypothetical situation constructed by the interviewer:

I: *What if these apples hadn't been good? What would you do then?*  
 R: *Well, then I'd have to make do with these [organic] bananas or oranges or something else, wouldn't I?*  
 I: *Would you think about making do with ordinary apples?*  
 R: *mmm...NO! (Regular user F during shopping trip)*

Apart from this case, all other regular users account for constraints, in terms of practical and/or economic considerations, that play a role in regard to product choice, and in regard to the substitution strategies they employ while shopping. This also applies to other *dedicated* regular users, who do tend to employ either *close substitution* or *re-try* strategies when practicable. But it would seem that practical circumstances often counteract these strategies. Thus, there were also relatively many examples of *treason* on the part of these consumers during the course of a single shopping trip. While unpacking her shopping, for example, one dedicated regular user lifted up a tin of conventional tomatoes she had bought and exclaimed:

R: *That's very annoying! They were sold out of the organic tomatoes.*  
 I: *You would have preferred organic chopped tomatoes?*  
 R: *Yes, I don't like those big tomatoes [if she had chosen whole organic tomatoes] in meat sauce. One can put them in the blender of course, but then these cherry tomatoes caught my eye, and I thought it might be a bit easier to deal with them. (Regular user B, while unpacking after a shopping trip)*

A general rule followed in situations in which *treason* is committed (rather than *re-location* pursued) by this regular user is summed up in the following way:

I: *So, this is an example of a situation in which you would have preferred an organic product. But it isn't there, and so you end up with the ordinary one.*  
 R: *Yes, of course. I wouldn't go off to IRMA afterwards, hauling all my shopping bags. I couldn't be bothered doing that...I couldn't be bothered running around to all kinds of shops. (Regular user B, while unpacking after a shopping trip)*

On the other hand, the same regular user employs a *re-try* strategy on specific basic products such as milk and on some processed products that last longer:

I: *I'd just like to ask you about that olive oil you bought. Supposing they had been out of the organic one..?*  
 R: *I don't think I'd have bought any then. Because we have some rape seed oil we could have used instead.*  
 I: *Why would you not have bought it then?*  
 R: *Because I could get it another time, when they have what I want.*  
 I: *Because you already have something you can use at home?*  
 R: *Yes, it's because I already have a substitute.*  
 I: *So it's not the same situation then – as when it's something you need to use right away?*  
 R: *That's right. (Regular user B, while unpacking after a shopping trip)*

The same regular user also employs *close substitution*, as when she approached the fruit stall in the supermarket during a shopping trip and looked closely at the organic plumbs:

R: *I need them for his lunch box at school.*  
 I: *What were you looking for?*  
 R: *Plumbs, but they look a bit sour and not very good.*

[Observation: the organic plumbs are replaced, and organic kiwi selected instead.] (*Regular user B during shopping trip*)

Another dedicated regular user, who has a generalized preference for organic products, also committed *treason* due to practical circumstances:

I: *So, it is precisely this [organic] wholemeal rye bread that you usually buy?*

R: *Yes, it is. But I must say, IRMA doesn't always have it in stock, and then we have to pick out something else.*

I: *And what do you choose when that happens?*

R: *Em-m, well, we might take that one there for example [pointing at a conventional wholemeal rye bread]... the fact is, we are a bit lazy. We prefer the ready sliced kind, like that one. Yes, and then it would also depend on the sell-by dates. (Regular user C during shopping trip)*

However, it was also apparent that this same regular user employs *close substitution* or *re-try* in other situations. The former was observed for example in the following episode:

*And now I need to get some tomatoes [standing looking at the shelves of tinned tomatoes, selects a tin].*

*It [looking at organic tinned tomatoes] should have been chopped ones, but they don't have them. Then it will have to be the ones that aren't chopped. [Observation: selects tin of organic whole tomatoes.] (Regular user C during shopping trip)*

In contrast to *dedicated* regular users, the other subgroup of regular users (who tend to display thrifty shopping habits, shop in discount stores and select organic variants within a narrower range of product categories) only employ strategies of *close substitution*, *re-location* or *re-try* to a very limited extent. These strategies are occasionally employed by some members of this subgroup with respect to some specific products. One example<sup>25</sup> is the following:

I: *Which eggs would you have, if you were going to buy eggs?*

R: *Then I'd buy the organic ones, or else the free range. And if they were out of both of those, then that's too bad – I'd have gone somewhere else to buy them.*

I: *The battery ones wouldn't do?*

R: *I know very well that Allan [her partner] would be mad, if I did that, he really would.*

I: *Why?*

R: *Because he thinks one shouldn't buy battery eggs. He insists on that in a big way. That's the point on which he makes his presence felt. So, on that point, I would go to another shop. (Regular user D during shopping trip)*

The strategies most often employed by this subgroup, however, when a sought for organic product is not available, are those of *surrender* or *treason*. The following example regards a situation in which the organic produce is not assessed as being sufficiently fresh:

R: *I just began buying more... yes, vegetables too, if they are OK. Well, that depends on how they look.*

I: *What do you do if they don't look so good?*

R: *If they don't look good – the organic – then I don't buy them. There are times when they don't look good. Then I won't have them... (Regular user G)*

The following case illustrates an instance in which *treason* would have been employed if the selected organic product had not happened to meet the customer's quality demands:

I: *Why did you buy those tomatoes? [organic cherry tomatoes]*

R: *They fit perfectly into my child's lunch box, and they look, you know, fairly nice.*

I: *Is there anything else you happened to look at, the price or something?*

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<sup>25</sup> Notice that the specific reason for choosing eggs is related to general animal welfare values and is only indirectly related to organic production methods – thus, the user would be quite willing to choose free range eggs as a perfectly good substitute for organic eggs. See section 4.3 on this point.

R: No, I just needed these tomatoes.

I: I see they are organic. Is that something that was important?

R: No, not really, not much. If they hadn't been organic, I would have bought them anyway. They were the tomatoes that looked the nicest. (Regular user A, while unpacking after shopping trip)

### **Occasional users**

Among 'health-oriented' occasional users, the only substitution strategies employed were those of *surrender* or *treason*, as illustrated by the following:

R: That one [pointing to a packet of conventional oatmeal] – I get that sometimes if they don't have the other one.

I: So if the organic one is out of stock, that's the one you get?

R: Yes. (Occasional user B, during shopping trip)

The following example illustrates willingness to *surrender* (and *treason*), while retaining a strong preference for using the organic variant in certain dishes:

I: What if the organic ones [lemons] had been out of stock?

R: In that case, I actually have some [conventional lemons] in the refrigerator. I could have used them instead for making glögg, but then I wouldn't have been able to make chutney.

I: Is that because you wouldn't be able to use the rind? [referring to earlier conversation about toxins]

R: Yes. (Occasional user A, while unpacking, following shopping trip)

Summing up, it can be said that the strategies of *surrender* and *treason* seemed to be quite widespread in practical shopping situations among regular as well as occasional users. The strategies of *close substitution*, *re-location* and *re-try* were more prevalent among the *dedicated*, quality orientated regular users, whose purchasing pattern is characterised by a generalized preference for organic variants within a wide range of product categories.

## **4.3 Loyalty towards organic foods: Choice of shopping venues**

### **Regular users**

Apart from the substitution strategies employed in the context of shopping, the majority of regular users also try to organise shopping routines and to choose shopping venue(s) in ways that maximize the possibility of being able to purchase organic products, including preferred brands and processed products. It is also clear that the organisation of shopping trips also depends upon the extent to which regular users feel they can afford to use relatively more money than they would otherwise use on food products. Considerations of this kind appear to be relatively widespread, and are not always related to household income level. As we have seen earlier, some regular users have internalized thrifty purchasing habits, and the relative price difference between organic and conventional variants can constrain purchasing decisions even among those who have not. Also, members of this group differ considerably with respect to their involvement in food quality issues.

*Dedicated* regular users, all of whom have a generalized preference for choosing organic variants within a wide range of product categories (see Section 4.1), choose their favoured shopping venues explicitly with a view to maximizing access to a wide variety of organic products (as well as meeting other quality standards).

R: We shop a great deal in IRMA [an upmarket supermarket with a wide range of organic products]

I: Why is that?

R: Because it's not so big and they have lots of the good things I want.

I: Which things for instance?

R: It is all the organic things. Then it's also because it's not so big and, like I said, we think they're really nice and helpful in IRMA. (Regular user C)

R: ...But otherwise, not greengrocers – well, they don't have much that's organic.

I: So, is that the reason why you avoid shopping there?

R: Yes, we don't use the greengrocer's very much at all. Now and again – if we just happen to need that head of lettuce – it's handier just to go there.

I: But otherwise it's SUPER BRUGSEN and IRMA?

R: Yes, that's right (Regular user B)

Another member of this subgroup organises her shopping routine such that she switches between branches of an upmarket supermarket with a wide range of organic products (IRMA), a supermarket that exclusively sells organic products (EGEFELD) and some specialty shops that stock organic products. She recently migrated from a rural region in southern Denmark to the capital, and has actively searched for shopping venues that could meet her need to buy organic products within all product categories whenever possible. The following exchange took place en route to one of these preferred venues:

I: You were saying back there that you wouldn't shop in that SUPER BRUGSEN across the road. What was it you were saying about that? I didn't quite catch it.

R: They have [organic] grain and flour and that kind of thing. I've also bought those things over there. I'd say I'd been in there twice in the last two years. That's not a lot, but you know when you move to a new place, you're inclined to try out the shops that are near by. And then, then I succeeded in finding this one here [IRMA]. There's another IRMA out in Valby, but it's very small and there's not a lot of room. It's good enough though. It was easier for me to go there when I was still going down south to work.

I: Supposing IRMA didn't exist, what would you do then? Would you then go over to SUPER BRUGSEN?

R: No, I don't think so. I would just have to find somewhere else. You know, there's a good shop on Gammel Kongevej just before you get to EGEFELD's. Oh, but that's also an IRMA! Well, the good thing about living in Copenhagen is that there are lots of IRMAs – isn't that right [laughs]? (Regular user F, during shopping trip).

As these narratives and experiences illustrate, *dedicated* regular users who have a generalised preference for organic products tend to assess shopping venues in relation to their stock of these products and to develop shopping routines that secure their ready access to preferred products. This orientation results in the choice of high quality supermarkets and/or specialty shops. This loyalty strategy also entails that this subgroup are less often called upon to make substitution choices due to the fact that preferred products are out of stock. Also, the range of organic products in the selected venue ensures, in the event of dissatisfaction with the quality of a particular product, that *close substitution* (as illustrated in Section 4.1) of one organic product for another will be an option that can be employed with relative ease.

With regard to the less dedicated subgroup of regular users, it should be recalled that they tend to have thrifty shopping habits (see Section 2.1). It transpires that this is an omnipresent habitual orientation that is also exercised in regard to the choice of shopping venues, and not only in relation to the choice of products. In effect, this places a considerable limitation on the range of organic goods as compared to other goods that can be purchased at these venues. It also transpires, however, that this group nevertheless chooses to shop in the particular discount chain (NETTO) that maximises the possibility of their being able to purchase a relatively large amount of organic goods. Both subgroups of regular users resemble each other in this respect, although the range of shopping venues considered by each subgroup differs. A thrifty orientation imposes a limitation on the habitual choice of shopping venues, but also upon access to the range of organic products that are available, as illustrated in the following exchange:

R: There's a big NETTO in Slagelse as well that I used to shop in, and they had carrots, potatoes and onions that were organic. I don't remember when it was, but I remember thinking: ah, isn't it nice that they've started to stock organic things.

I: Why did you think that?

R: That's because I want organic things. But I also want them at a reasonable price. They shouldn't be too expensive, now should they? (Regular user E)

For this regular user, given the limitation on her choice of possible shopping venues, the introduction of organic products to the stock of a discount supermarket had been a pleasant development since it brought her the possibility of purchasing organic products (see section 3.2 on the issue of availability). At the same time she constantly monitors the supply situation in other discount outlets (in this case: NETTO, ALDI and LIDL) in her local area:

*I can see that they have had some sliced meats in NETTO that are organic, and I can see that ALDI have started to stock some organic things as well. I went out to LIDL once, but I couldn't immediately see that they have any organic things. But then I went through it all fairly quickly, because I didn't have much time that day. (Regular user E)*

Among this subgroup of regular users the price issue is clearly important and the general tendency is that many organic products are seen as no longer being prohibitively expensive (see section 3.2 on the issue of price levels). However, the constant focus on the price of organic products among this subgroup reveals that price level imposes an important *real world* restriction on the choice of organic goods in practice:

*I: Why "always organic oatmeal" in particular?*

*R: It's probably because we had it out at my workplace. I thought in fact that it tasted nice. And then, there wasn't such a big price difference. (Regular user D)*

*... and carrots – I always buy organic carrots – are worth it too... They're not dearer than – not very much anyway, about four crowns (Regular user G)*

Although this subgroup of regular users does employ loyalty strategies with regard to their choice of shopping venues, the restriction of their choice to discount outlets limits in practice their experience of and access to the full range of organic products that it is possible to purchase on the Danish market. It can be noted here that the range of organic variants stocked by discount chains is relatively small compared with mainstream or upmarket supermarkets and some specialty shops. Thus, at the end of 2006, the discount chain (NETTO) with the widest range of organic products among discount chains on the Danish market was stocking 40 different organic products. This can be compared to the upmarket chain (IRMA) with the widest range among supermarkets, which was stocking approximately 700 organic products at the same point in time (Økologisk Landsforening 2007).

Recapitulating on our findings with respect to product loyalty, it can be noted that differences between two subgroups of regular users indicate that two consumer segments are at issue. Although both subgroups are very positive towards organic products at a conceptual level (see Chapter 3), there are major differences regarding shopping habits. These include the range of organic products that are purchased, the loyalty towards organic products exhibited in the substitution strategies employed when organic products are not purchased, as well as the consequences entailed by loyalty strategies with regard to choice of shopping venues. In this respect, the tasks of retaining loyalty among already existing regular users and that of expanding loyalty among regular users, who increase the proportion of their organic purchases, would need to be assessed with considerable attention to differences between these two apparent segments of organic consumers.

### ***Occasional users***

As we have seen (Section 4.1), 'taste-oriented' occasional users tend to buy organic products by coincidence. No loyalty strategies can be said to exist for this subgroup, which is also the case for non users. Among the subgroup of occasional users that repeatedly buy some few specific products on a somewhat irregular basis, no loyalty strategies with respect to the choice of particular shopping venues in light of their stock of organic products were observed.

### 4.3 Barriers to loyalty

We will explore barriers of a practical kind that arise in the course of everyday shopping and were observed or reported with regard to purchasing organic foods. The topics of analysis at issue here (product range, quality, price, etc.) have already been taken up for analysis in Section 3.2. In that context, however, these topics were treated as *real world events* and *experience-based reasons* why consumers can and do change their minds and habits. Potential *levers* in the process of changing minds, however, may also prove to be potential barriers in the process of changing habits. These topics were treated from a retrospective perspective in the former context, while the perspective here is prospective. We explore current barriers with respect to a potentially increasing demand on the part of consumers in this section.

#### *The barrier of assortment*

One major barrier that is reported in interviews as well as shopping trips is that of limited assortment. That is to say, quite apart from the organic products that consumers are willing and able to purchase regularly in the course of their everyday shopping, they also sought after more organic products that were not available in their shopping environment. It was clear in many cases that the proportion of organic products relative to the total amount of food products purchased would have been greater, had these sought for products been available. Limited assortment, however, often restricts this demand. Once again, a difference in this respect between *dedicated* regular users and other regular users was observed and needs to be stressed.

The less dedicated subgroup tends to look for relatively ordinary standard products, such as a wider variety of vegetables and a higher level of processing. Illustrations of this barrier among regular users, who often shop in discount stores, are:

R: But in NETTO, they have a section for organic vegetables. They have more or less everything, from potatoes and carrots and leeks and tomatoes and broccoli and onions and...

I: That sounds like quite a selection.

R: Yes, and what more do they have – cauliflower maybe, have they had that? No, I don't think so. Now squash and avocados and that kind of thing, you can't get organic ones of those. No you can't do that. (Regular user G)  
[Observation: She proceeds to the frozen vegetables and starts to examine them.] I certainly wish they would start having them [frozen organic vegetables]. But no, not a sign of them. (Regular user E, during shopping trip)

The *dedicated* subgroup in contrast, who often do their shopping in supermarkets that stock a relatively wide range of organic products, tends to look for specialties, herbs and spices and products of a more exotic kind:

We're out of oregano, actually – even though I forgot to put it on my list. And we have to have that. It's hopeless if we're suddenly out of that. [Goes to the spice shelves] Now let me see what I can do here. There are the big jars and of course the organic ones are in the small jars. I want to get the organic ones, only organic ones in the long run, but they don't really have so many kinds yet. [Searches for oregano] No, they don't have it, it doesn't look like it. So, I'll take this one instead [a large packet of conventional oregano]. Well, there's not much option there. (Regular user C, during shopping trip)

Generally speaking, both *dedicated* regular users and a majority of other regular users encounter problems regarding the available assortment. The difference between them concerned the product categories they sought and missed.

A few of the less dedicated regular users and of the more positively inclined occasional users, however, did not bring up the issue of assortment as presenting a problem, nor was this observed in the course of their shopping. This barrier may not be one that is experienced by all subgroups of organic users at the present time.

### ***The barrier of poor quality***

Most regular users experience the quality of organic products has having improved over time (see Section 3.2). However, another frequently mentioned barrier for the purchase of organic products is the actual quality of specific products as assessed in a particular shop at a given time, sometimes on the basis of the sell-by date. This barrier is most frequently encountered with regard to the purchase of vegetables, fruit and milk.

I: *Is these are the organic things you usually buy?*

R: *Yes. And also tomatoes and apples, and...yes. If they look all right I will take them.*

I: *And what if they don't look all right?*

R: *Yes, well then I'd take something else [meaning not organic] (Regular user A, while unpacking).*

I: [Referring to organic carrots] *Is that what you usually get?*

R: *I wouldn't say "usually". I look at the carrots in the shop, and then I take the ones that look the most fresh. And very often, those organic things, they don't look that fresh (Occasional user A)*

The perceived poor quality” of organic products often refers to problems regarding the freshness of perishable produce:

*Then those organic things – they wouldn't keep. That was the vegetables mainly. And then that organic milk – that looked a bit stale too when I got it home. Those things influenced me, so that's why I don't usually buy organic. (Occasional user B)*

Again, problems with respect to the poor quality of organic fresh products are most often reported among thrifty regular users and occasional users. Whether or not *dedicated* regular users experience bad or rotten products, it would seem that this is not a problem that occupies their minds.

### ***The barrier of price***

The barrier most often mentioned by all user groups is that of the premium price of organic products. Not surprisingly this barrier is a prevalent and particularly strong barrier among thrifty regular users and occasional users, both with regard to their selection of shopping venues and products. *Dedicated* regular users seldom mention the relative price difference between organic and conventional products as constituting an issue or a problem as such. However, as we have seen, the actual price or price difference can also be the reason why a member of this subgroup does not purchase a particular organic product. The price barrier crops up as a generalized perception of a significant difference between organic and non-organic products, especially among non-users of organic foods and the ‘taste-oriented’ subgroup of occasional users.

The fact that price is a barrier is continuously affirmed by the members of all user groups when accompanied on shopping trips. Price is often considered and prices are often compared, sometimes with reference to the comparative size or other differences between organic and conventional products. Stories about concrete shopping experiences related to price barriers are manifold. Some illustrations extracted from the accounts of regular users are noted below.

R: *If the [organic] cucumbers aren't that big, then I buy one of the others. Otherwise I'd have to buy one nearly every day.*

I: *Because you eat a lot of that?*

R: *Yes, and tomatoes too. If they're not so nice or if I'm not shopping the next day, then I take one of the big packets [of conventional tomatoes]. I need so many, for the lunch boxes. (Regular user A)*

R: *Well, yes, I try to do it, but I don't ONLY buy organic things.*

I: *What do you mean exactly?*

R: *Well, take pasta for example. I don't buy organic pasta. I mean, I have to think about the fact that it costs quite a bit more. So there's an economic aspect to it. (Regular user G)*

I: And why did you pick those eggs?

R: *The price was OK – about a crown a piece*

I: *How about the organic ones?*

R: *They were much more expensive. I buy them sometimes, but they're not twice as good, the organic ones. (Regular user H, while unpacking after shopping trip)*

Among thrifty regular users a conceptual distinction between “cheap” and “expensive” organic products is widespread. They tend to be very clear on this point, and “cheap” organic products are those that are purchased. The threshold between these categorizations varies, depending on the product category and also upon a concrete assessment of particular products that is carried out in the shop. However, an illustration of the general reasoning behind this pattern can be given:

R: *For example, down here in NETTO one day, I saw an organic cucumber at 12 crowns and an ordinary one that cost 6 crowns. Now that's a pretty big difference, wouldn't you say?*

I: *So, what did you do?*

R: *I bought the ordinary one, because I'm not all THAT fanatic about it.*

I: *So, where do you draw the line?*

R: *Well, I don't have the answer to that. But right there, that was the limit for me. But if get a kilo of organic carrots, you can often get that for about 7 or 8 crowns. Then you can get a kilo and a half of the ordinary ones for 5 crowns. Then I think there's not such a big difference. But, well, it's hard to say where I draw the line. (Regular user D)*

Among the ‘health-oriented’ subgroup of occasional users, the price barrier is even more deeply felt. The illustration below might be interpreted as indicating that some members of this subgroup are likely to remain occasional users and unlikely to increase their demand for organic products, given their perception of price differences between organic and conventional products:

[During shopping the informant points at organic and conventional 1 kg. packets of wheat flour on the same shelf. The organic variant costs 16 crowns and the conventional 6 crowns]

R: *Now that is really expensive!*

I: *What do think of it?*

R: *If you're going to look after your money, then it's obvious that you'd buy the one for almost a third of the price.*

I: *So what would you do?*

R: *I'd buy the one that's three times as cheap. You can't taste the difference.*

[Later in interview] I: *Those 16 crowns [referring to the wheat flour] that was just too much?*

I: *Well, it's true that if you only buy flour once every 6 weeks then it is not a huge difference. But it's the psychological thing in it, right? When I stand there looking at it, I say to myself: .are you CRAZY! (Occasional user A, during shopping)*

[During shopping we pass by some organic apples]

I: *... and there are some organic ones.*

R: *And that's not something we're going to look at. No, it's not, certainly not. I mean, 4 apples for 19 crowns. Ha, ha... that's over the limit anyway.*

I: *You wouldn't dream of it?*

R: *No, I wouldn't. (Occasional user B)*

As these examples illustrate, price differences can be perceived as being “ridiculously” high, and the sense of “throwing money out the window” seems to be deeply internalized by this subgroup. The price barrier thus functions to ensure that perceived rewards for buying organic products are not converted into shopping habits that accord with held convictions.

One such barrier is that *value-based* reasons for purchasing organic animal products appear to be very much less clear to many consumers.

### ***Particular barriers with regard to animal products***

The barriers considered thus far apply for the most part to organic products in general. Animal products, however, appear to constitute a particular category, in relation to which several barriers are operative at once – especially with regard to meat products. Apart from problems of supply and relatively high premium prices, specific conceptual barriers also appear to be operative with regard to meat products.

The point of information about organic production that is most widespread in all user groups concerned regulations with respect to the use of pesticides. The desire to avoid pesticide residues also seems to be a relatively widespread consideration with respect to the purchase of organic fruit and vegetables. The view that organic vegetable products are healthier is widespread. Health rewards related to the purchase of organic meat, however, are seldom mentioned<sup>26</sup>. This pattern suggests that *value-based rewards* related to the perspective of ‘personal care’ are not prevalent or widespread among consumers with regard to the purchase of organic meat<sup>27</sup>. Viewed from the perspective of ‘external care’, it might be expected that the issue of animal welfare would provide consumers with a reason why organic products should be preferred to their conventional variants. However, *dedicated* regular users are the only user group whose purchasing pattern clearly includes a preference for organic meat products<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, a tendency to regard organic meat products as one alternative among other perfectly acceptable alternatives with respect to animal welfare issues was also clearly apparent among this subgroup, as well as the members of other user groups. Several strategies were pursued with regard to animal welfare, some of which are based upon the substitution of organic by conventional products.

I: *Do you think that it is just as bad to eat non-organic meat as it is to eat non-organic fruit and vegetables?*

R: *Here [in Denmark] we put all sort of things into the animals. So...And one could hope that the organic farmers not are allowed to use all these chemicals and hormones. If I am to have chops then I often go down to the butcher. And they sell “Antonius” pigs [a special Danish brand]. And they say that the animals are treated well. I have to trust that, right? (Regular user A)*

... *we know someone who has some calves, and they’re well looked after out on grass – and we get an eighth of a calf or whatever amount it is every now and again. It’s not exactly organic, but at least they’ve been looked after well... (Regular user C)*

*Real world events* with respect to supply, assortment and price premiums also constitute barriers regarding the purchase of organic meat products. Firstly, only minced meat rather than chops, steaks and joints of meat are readily available in supermarkets, according to the observations of *dedicated* regular consumers (the subgroup that usually shop in upmarket supermarkets and specialty stores). This subgroup also reports some degree of regularity with regard to the supply of processed luncheon meat products. Other regular users, who frequent, discount supermarkets, do not experience a steady supply:

R: *I hope they’ll soon get more meat in the shops, because there certainly isn’t much.*

I: *They don’t have organic meat in NETTO?*

R: *Certainly not that I’ve seen, and if there was some, I didn’t see it. (Regular user E)*

When members of this subgroup do recall having seen some organic meat products in their favoured shopping venues, the level and regularity of the available supply is not seen as one that can support

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that informants were not directly prompted with regard to this topic. The absence of health benefits with respect to organic meat is a pattern that emerged from our analysis of narratives, and further research on this topic is called for.

<sup>27</sup> The health benefits of dairy products, especially milk, are sometimes stressed, however. This is quite paradoxical and could be related to a number of factors, including widespread beliefs in the healthy properties of milk, concern with the unhealthy properties of meat with particular reference to fat percent (O’Doherty Jensen *et al.* 2008), and the conceptualisation of animal welfare as applied to dairy products, eggs and meat products, respectively.

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix 1, Table B.

habitual purchases. Apart from this supply problem, a further major barrier concerns the perceived high price of the available organic meat products.

*I haven't eaten all that much organic meat, but I bought minced meat in IRMA...It has a better taste... and I would really like to buy more organic meat, but I just can't afford it. (Regular user G)*

*But I also want it at a reasonable price. It shouldn't be that expensive, should it? I can hear that it doesn't sound very logical, but you can buy a chicken for 19.95, and I don't want to pay 85 crowns for an organic one. But I would pay about 45-50 crowns for an organic one. (Regular user E)*

It would also seem that a further reason why some consumers substitute organic animal products with products from other production systems is that the latter offer the benefit of animal friendly husbandry at a cheaper price.

R: *We have very occasionally bought an organic chicken, and they were very expensive. Now we've found a place where we can buy chickens that have been treated well...* [conventional chickens]

I: *And how's the price?*

R: *They're certainly dearer than the cheapest. But in fact it's a huge chicken you get, like that* [demonstrates the size]. *That's because they let them live much longer. (Regular user C)*

## 4.5 Conclusion: The shopping habits of regular consumers of organic food as compared with occasional and non-users

Four purchasing patterns with respect to organic products were distinguished among the consumers in this study (apart from that of never buying these products). There is a pattern in which products are bought coincidentally and a pattern in which one (or a very few) specific products are bought. Among regular users there is also a pattern in which products are bought within several categories (three or more) and a pattern in which a generalized preference for organic products across all food product categories has evolved. Regular users that display a generalized preference towards organic products were designated as *dedicated* organic users.

In actual shopping situations, the substitution strategies adopted by *dedicated* and other regular are not notably dissimilar. Very often *treason* is employed when a sought for organic product is sold out. At a more reflective level, however, regular users also employ loyalty strategies when choosing a venue for shopping. All regular users choose shopping environments in which it is expected (and known beforehand) that their sought for organic products are available. In this way they maximize the chances of not having to substitute their preferred products. However, the choices made by these two subgroups of regular users have different consequences. *Dedicated* regular users choose shops known to have a very large stock of organic products. This strategy entails that they can maximize the chances of being able to substitute a sought for organic product by means of *close substitution* (e.g. choosing organic kiwi instead of organic plums). Other regular users choose shopping venues that accord with their overarching *thrifty* orientation. This entails that they have access to a moderate supply of organic goods within a limited number of product categories.

It thus transpires that there appear to be two archetypical segments of loyal organic consumers. This is a crucial distinction because, as has been shown, these segments choose different retail chains that differ significantly in their marketing strategies. It would seem that the special features of distribution within the organic sector in Denmark, based on mass distribution through a variety of mainstream channels, including discount stores, has created a demand among less dedicated consumers that would not otherwise have started an organic shopping career due to their thrifty shopping habits.

It has also emerged from this analysis that the patterns whereby one or two specific products are bought during a given shopping trip or purchased by coincidence are rarely associated with loyalty to

organic products as such. The only exception to this concerns a preference for a specific product among ‘health-oriented’ occasional users. All occasional users exhibit one of these two patterns. They would not buy any organic products, if these were not available on a regular basis in their ordinary shopping environments. Although ‘health-oriented’ occasional users are pleased with the organic idea, they only purchase organic goods because of their widespread availability and only on the condition that the relative price difference as compared to conventional counterparts is low.

As described earlier (see Chapter 3) the availability of organic foods has been limited. Dissatisfaction with limited assortment was also observed among a majority of regular users, who were unable to find an organic variant of the product they sought while shopping. This clearly indicates a basis for increased demand that is not currently met.

Dissatisfaction with the perceived quality of organic products on display (the freshness of vegetables and fruit, the sell-by date on milk, etc.) also constitutes a barrier to purchase. This is most prevalent among non- users and occasional users, and not a notable barrier among *dedicated* regular users. The perceived *higher price* of organic products is another very strong barrier. In general, the higher price is the reason that non-users and coincidental occasional users are not interested in organic products (as described in Chapter 3). More interestingly, the ‘health-oriented’ occasional users and the *thrifty* regular users mention price as a very important consideration that prevents them from purchasing a greater number of organic products. In this respect the *thrifty* regular users conceptually distinguishes between “cheap” and “expensive” organic products, between which only the former goods are purchased, frequently in discount outlets.

Organic meat products represent a special product group in which there are particular conceptual barriers at stake. A notable motivation among the organic consumers for wanting to purchase organic meat products concerns animal welfare. However, according to organic users there is a large variety of competing meat products on the market from production systems that also ensure proper and appropriate treatment of animals. Thus, unlike other categories of organic products, such as fruit and vegetables, organic meat products are not perceived as constituting a category for which proper substitutes do not exist. This conceptual barrier for purchasing organic meat products is most probably reinforced by the fact that the organic users experience a scarce supply of organic meat and that the available meat products are very expensive.

## 5. The role of particular events and persons in the development of organic consumption patterns

In this chapter we examine the influences on the development of organic consumption patterns that can be traced to specific events or persons within the household and its friendship circle (Section 5.1). This is followed by a similar analysis of the influence of external events and agents (Section 5.2). Finally, we address the issue posed by Gardner (2004) as to whether the development of organic consumption patterns among Danish consumers can be described as indicating an abrupt or gradual change of mind (section 5.3).

### 5.1 The influences of lifecycle events, family members and friends

#### *Regular users*

Not all regular users associate the development of their pattern of organic consumption with the occurrence of particular events or the influence of particular people in their own lives. Rather, they explain their change of mind and habits as having been influenced by their value-based convictions on the one hand and by their experience of market developments on the other. However, some regular users did pinpoint particular events, including the birth of child, the occurrence of illness and a rise in income, as having influenced their consumption of organic foods. Parents, partners, other family members and friends are frequently mentioned as the people who have exerted influence on a preference for organic products.

Among some regular users who had had or currently have children in their households, it was made clear that the arrival of children had constituted a tipping point in their purchasing habits. One older informant recounted her attempts to procure biodynamic foods thirty years earlier and added this comment with respect to her feelings about the importance of this project:

*... Because we believed it was the right thing to do, you know? If one could get hold of healthier foods, and if one could give it to children right from the start, then there would be a really good chance that they would have a healthy life and a healthy body, you know what I mean?(Regular user F)*

Another regular user, having pinpointed the precise year in which she had started to buy organic products, was asked the following question:

*I: Why 2004, in particular?*

*R: I'm not sure. It was probably only because I felt that something new should happen. It might also be because that was when we had Alexander [her first baby]. We began thinking that we should get products that are a bit better - we shouldn't just have any old thing any more. (Regular user D)*

However, in other instances, the arrival or presence of children in the household had not apparently brought about any changes with respect to the consumption of organic products – at least none that were apparent to informants. In some cases this was due to the fact that these habits were already firmly established by the time children had arrived, as the response to the following question makes clear:

*I: Do you think that [the pattern of organic consumption] might change when Adrian [the informant's son] moves away from home?*

*R: I really don't think so. It's such an ingrained habit and, like I said, that is also the way we did things before we had him. So, I can't imagine we'd change that. (Regular user B)*

A further comment from this informant clarifies the fact that the arrival of her child had not weakened, and had probably reinforced her decision to consume organic products:

*And I also think it is very important that I can get hold of organic food, so that I am not filling him up with all kinds of toxic things. (Regular user B)*

Summarising the evidence on this point, it can be said that among regular users, who are parents, the arrival of children tended to operate as a lever for a change of habits with respect to increasing organic consumption and to reinforce existing convictions with respect to organic products.

Some few regular users recounted episodes in which a sudden or chronic illness had directed their attention towards organic foods and the importance of a healthy lifestyle in general:

*I: Could I just go back to what you were saying about the time you found out that Lasse was sick? [A son diagnosed as allergic] That must have meant that you had to give some thought to what you could buy and eat...  
R: Yes, it certainly did. That was one thing, and another thing was – well, I still do that – I wash all our clothes in ‘Neutral’ washing powder. Yes, and I excluded all artificial colourings. They’ve never been given ‘Fun’ fruit syrup. They only got things when I could read on the label that they didn’t contain colouring. Well, luckily enough you can get organic milk all over the place these days...but I’ve gone out of my way to get it too – the organic things. (Regular user G)*

As described earlier (Chapter 2), the transition from youth to adulthood is often characterised as a transition to a more serious lifestyle and a tendency to develop a greater sense of responsibility in several spheres. It usually also involves a change in income level in an upward direction. The youngest regular user interviewed had recently undergone a transition from being a low income student to having his first professional job. He was currently sharing the expense on his flat with a room-mate, and was still in a transitory phase of life. He explains his change of mind with respect to organic foods in relation to his rising income:

*R: ... That is, after I had a bit more money in my pocket in recent years. While I was studying, I sometimes had a bit more too. When I worked a bit more on the side and earned a bit more, I began shopping in a different kind of shop and got a bit more involved in it – used a bit more money on food and sometimes ate out. ...  
I: Would you say that you have also begun to buy more organic products?  
R: Yes, that's just it. It's been a steady increase.  
I: Why is that?  
R: Well, that's the way it's gone with the income too. That's the way things are. (Regular user H)*

With regard to the influence of particular people, as compared to particular events, it is clear that the influence exerted by family members upon each other is particularly strong. Couples, for example, frequently perceive their shopping for organic foods as a common project<sup>29</sup>, which in turn appears to reinforce their motivation for purchasing these products.

*I: Is that something that you and Michael talked about together [shopping for organic foods]?  
R: Yes, well he also thinks organic products are a good thing – especially when it comes to eggs. He would absolutely never in his life buy battery eggs. (Regular user D)*

*I: How would you describe your own thoughts about organic foods at that time? [When they moved together]  
R: I would say: much the same as today. I’ve become a bit more aware of – well, I used to think of ‘organic’ as only having to do with food. I’d never thought much about the fact that there are also organic textiles. Kirsten is the one who has made me aware of that. And I have listened to what she had to tell me. (Regular user C, secondary interview with male partner)*

At the same time, there is a tendency for the woman in the household to express the more convinced attitudes and more loyal shopping behaviour with respect to organic purchases or to have done so in the

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<sup>29</sup> This part of the analysis is based on users’ own descriptions of their partners’ views (when interviewing the partner was not possible) or on partners’ own words (secondary interviews).

past, while the man has adopted the role of the willing learner, occasionally it would seem with a note of reluctance.

*I: You seemed to say that you are not THAT much focused on whether or not things are organic?*

*R: Yes, that's right, but that's as compared to Kirsten. There can be times when I would be prepared to buy some products that are not quite so organic, but they would still have to be OK products. (Regular user C, secondary interview with male partner)*

Parents are often mentioned as having exerted an important influence on food habits. As we have seen earlier, the habits and attitudes learned as a child are often referred to by regular users as having influenced current preferences for and concerns about healthy foods. This includes instances in which parents are accorded the role of having exerted a direct influence upon the development of organic purchasing patterns:

*I: So was it from one day to the next then that you began [to buy organic products]?*

*R: I'd say it was... I think it was also because my mother began at the same time. (Regular user D)*

This channel of influence is only recounted by younger regular users, however, all of whom mention parental influences as having had an impact on their current interest in healthy eating and/or organic foods. Relatively older regular users do not mention their parents as having exerted direct influences of this kind. The generational difference on this point is quite clear. It can probably be accounted in a straightforward manner insofar as the dissemination of the idea that there is an alternative to industrialised agribusiness had its point of departure in the Danish context during the 1970s. Similarly, during the same period, what is now known as the epidemiological transition shifted the focus of public health discourse away from the threat of infectious diseases to the threat posed by unhealthy lifestyles, including the threat of unhealthy eating habits. It would seem likely that only younger persons, who grew up in the '60s, '70s or later, might have been exposed to relatively strong parental influences on these points as they grew up.

Some regular users had heard about particular organic products from friends, as a result of which they had started to purchase these products themselves.

*It was probably because we had some friends who got a vegetable box from ÅRSTIDERNE [an Internet-based vegetable box-scheme]. So that had an influence...(Regular user D)*

*We gave it a go because it was healthy, and then someone had said that it tasted more like real milk than the other milk... so I thought I'd give it a try. (Regular users G)*

However, there were few such accounts of one-way paths of influence among friends, and some regular users did not mention any friends or acquaintances as having influenced them. This is not surprising in light of the findings reported earlier regarding the fact that many regular users prefer not to recommend organic products to anyone outside the nearest family circle (see Section 3.3).

There were several accounts of reciprocal influences among friends that appeared to operate in a manner that mutually reinforced convictions, not least among *dedicated* regular users:

*I: Did anyone make the suggestion that you should try organic milk back then [referring to the past]?*

*R: No, I don't think so. It was something I had read about...*

*[Later] ... but then, it's so widespread in our friendship circle. (Regular user B)*

Other stories about friends, neighbours, colleagues or fellow students also indicate that influence is largely reciprocal, tending to reinforce existing convictions and habits. It would seem likely that much of this kind of influence takes place in the form of observing the food habits of others, supplemented by occasional comment or discussion, and may not be conceived by informants as constituting a form of influence as such. In contrast, accounts of the influence of parents (as reported by younger consumers) suggest the presence of very clear memories. Perhaps influence of this kind becomes particularly clear in retrospect

when people have moved away from home and not least when food habits are negotiated with a partner in the process of establishing a new household.

### ***Occasional users***

Only the ‘health-oriented’ subgroup of occasional users can be described as having undergone a change of mind with respect to organic consumption. Among the members of this subgroup, however, there is no mention of a particular event as having influenced the inclination to buy or consume organic products. One occasional user mentions that friends and acquaintances have exerted a gradual influence upon her tendency to buy organic products:

*OK, some of the people I know are most – well, they are inclined to ONLY buy organic products, and they are also inclined to preach about it a bit. So it’s like water dripping on a stone. One is affected in the long run. Of course one gets affected by it – one hears the same kind of talk time after time in all kinds of contexts. It gets through in the end. (Occasional user A)*

Another occasional user, whose diet is almost, but not fully, vegetarian, mentions his wife as the primary influence upon his healthy eating habits. It is probable that their joint focus on health also encourages this occasional user to buy his preferred organic product.

## **5.2 The influences of external events and agents**

By external agents we refer to the positive or negative influence of experts whether exerted by word-of-mouth, through mass media or other sources, and to the role of media coverage more generally, insofar as the influence of such persons is revealed in consumer narratives with regard to organic foods. We had envisaged that ‘experts’ of this kind might include persons ranging from an animal rights activist or health professional to a local farmer or shopkeeper. In exploring the role of external events, we had envisaged *real world events* beyond the sphere of the household and its circle of friends, referring to changes in local communities that may have exerted influence on the shopping habits of informants with particular reference to organic products.

### ***Experts and media***

Information disseminated through mass media appears to have influenced Danish consumers in what might be called an indirect fashion. While most users of organic products report some influence from mass media, none report a specific source of this influence. That is to say, specific books, programmes, magazines or talk shows do not feature in these narratives. Nor for the most part is any specific influence accorded to particular experts, whether exerted by word of mouth or through the media. In this respect, there does not appear to be a “smoking gun” that has exerted a particular influence during the recent decades of coverage. Nevertheless, users of organic products do report that they have obtained information about organic production and products through the media and that this information has also influenced their purchasing decisions. A typical response to a question on this issue was as follows:

*Oh, it’s just been the media in general. I wouldn’t say that it had been any particular thing as such. It’s just been in general. (Regular user D)*

One regular user went so far as to claim that, apart from an interest in healthy food that stemmed from childhood, the media had been her primary or only source of information:

*Well, it must be from the media... If you’re thinking about the circle I move in, I would say: no. I wouldn’t say that I have got my ideas from there. No, certainly I haven’t. (Regular user C)*

These accounts of “the media” as a general source of influence is credible in the light of a recent analysis of the coverage of organic production and products in Danish newspapers and magazines, indicting a high level of coverage of these topics in Danish national newspapers since the early 1990s. Positively oriented stories have regarded environmental sustainability, animal welfare, health benefits and other topics (Larsen 2006). These topics are the same as those identified among regular users in the present study as constituting *value-based rewards* associated with the consumption of organic foods (see Section 3.2). It seems highly likely therefore that Danish media have indeed exerted a strong and enduring, if somewhat indirect, influence on Danish consumers.

Two exceptions to the pattern we have termed that of ‘indirect’ influence should be noted. The first of these concerns the topic of egg production, as covered on Danish television and by other visual media. As we have seen in earlier parts of this analysis, several consumers express strong feelings on the issue of boycotting eggs from battery production systems, a pattern that in all likelihood has been directly influenced by media coverage. The exception is only partial, however, since no informants recall a specific programme or other source. Only the image of mistreated animals – “those poor hens” – remains firmly imprinted on memory.

The other exception refers, not to the role of media coverage in recent decades, but to that of experts in the life stories of relatively older regular users of organic foods. As we have seen in earlier parts of this analysis, representatives of “alternative” ideas that pre-date the more recent focus on environmental and health issues in popular media, feature in the life stories of some consumers. The work of Rudolf Steiner as recounted by an older *dedicated* regular user is a case in point:

*It must be about 30 or 32 years since I came across the work of Rudolf Steiner, his pedagogical theory in particular... Back then we tried to live up to some of the things we thought were right and important in theory, and that included eating biodynamic food, which wasn't the easiest thing in the world to get hold of... Yes, it sounds kind of banal to say this, but the idea was to find something or other to believe in, something or other that made one's life worthwhile... (Regular user F)*

Others, as we have seen, also mentioned an earlier interest in alternative ideas with particular reference to dietary theories, sometimes encountered in the context of pursuing a course of education.

### ***Negative media coverage***

Among the many food scandals reported in Danish media have been stories concerning fraudulent practices on the part of organic producers and fraudulent schemes or mistakes with reference to the certification, labelling or packaging of organic products. It would seem that stories of this kind could undoubtedly exert a negative influence on consumers regarding the purchase and consumption of organic products. On this point, a clear difference between regular users and others emerges from our analysis.

Some regular users mentioned stories of this kind, but tended in each case to view these events as isolated incidents that were not representative of the organic movement or of the food industry in Denmark. Non-users and some occasional users in contrast tended to refer to such stories as constituting one reason why they refused to purchase organic products or did not do so more often. In this sense, stories of this kind reinforced *resistances* to the idea of buying organic foods. It was also clear, as we have seen in earlier parts of this analysis however, that these views tended to be based on the informants' expectations regarding the likelihood that people do cheat, given the chance to do so. These narratives did not include reference to specific scandals or to specific stories reported in the media.

### ***External events***

The most frequently cited reason why regular users had increased their consumption of organic products referred to the increasing availability and range of these products in the shopping outlets they ordinarily frequented (see Chapter 3). Dedicated regular users selected their shopping venues in the light of their knowledge about supermarket chains that stocked most organic variants, while the more thrifty regular

users selected venues in the light of their knowledge about which chains offer organic products at the relatively lowest price level (see Chapter 4). There can be little doubt that *real world events* in the form of structural changes in the organic sector of the Danish market with regard to supply and distribution underlies these findings. The influence exerted by external events on the preferences of Danish consumers of organic food products, supported by media coverage, appears to have been very extensive indeed.

While mass distribution has been the policy pursued by the Danish organic sector during the last fifteen years, some events recounted by regular users supplement this picture with regard to the influence of direct sales channels. One regular user was a member of a vegetable box scheme; another reported that a colleague at work acted as an intermediary regarding the sale of organic eggs, while a third reported a similar channel with regard to the sale of organic vegetables from a local farm.

### 5.3 The first encounter with organic foods and the character of changes of mind

Gardner (2004) distinguishes changes of mind that occur apparently suddenly and abruptly – that is to say in an explicit fashion, such that aspects of the events, persons and processes involved tend to be remembered quite clearly – from changes of mind and attendant habits that occur gradually over time in a manner that may be virtually imperceptible and the details of which are poorly recalled. The life stories of informants in the present study enable us to analyse the changes of mind characteristic of these consumers of organic products.

It transpires that by far the most common change of mind and habits with respect to organic foods among the informants in this study was that of a gradual rather than a sudden process. Only two informants, both regular users, could recall the occasion on which they had first purchased organic products. The accounts of these incidents are the only accounts that could meaningfully be interpreted as descriptions of events that may have followed or led to a relatively abrupt change of mind. The following extracts from two accounts suggest relatively dramatic events that were experienced and reported in a somewhat emotionally charged manner and were recalled in some detail:

I: *So what were you thinking about the first time you said to yourself 'Now I'll walk down and buy organic milk'?*

R: *I said to myself that I had never known until now that there was an alternative to traditional cows. And I had never considered that something could be wrong with the milk I drink. And then, suddenly, there was this healthier alternative! The cow had grazed on grass that wasn't sprayed and had been given organic food – and then the milk would have to be more pure as well! And it was like a bolt from the blue. I thought: well, this is the way it HAS TO BE [laughs]... (Regular user B)*

*The very first time I bought it – that was when I was still living in Ramløse, actually... The place I was living in and the place where the children were going to school – well, they were just about as modern as can be. Now, to go from there and down to the farm [a biodynamic farm in the locality] was like entering a time zone that belonged to twenty-five or thirty years earlier. It was the whole atmosphere of the workplace, and then the shop... I really felt as though I had been re-placed in time... (Regular user E)*

As we have seen earlier, some few others could recall the year or the circumstances in which they had first purchased organic products, but they did not recall the occasion in detail or recount any dramatic or emotionally-charged experiences associated to the event as such.

The fact that most informants had gradually changed their minds and habits with respect to organic foods accords well with the findings that shopping habits and the *experience-based rewards* associated with these products had developed apace with increasing supply and availability, media coverage of these topics over time and the process whereby consumers influence each other by means of informal channels of communication. The mindset associated with *value-based* and *experience-based rewards* is relatively complex. Unlike many changes of mind that may take place with regard to food

choice, the change of mind at issue with respect to regular consumption of organic food does not regard a single product variant or even a single product category. It potentially regards all foods that are products of a particular production system. It would seem that the complexity of this change of mind bears little resemblance to the character of consumer decision-making in other spheres, whether those decisions regard switching from one brand of orange juice to another or – what is commonly conceived as a complex process of decision making – switching from one brand of car to another. Even when this mindset is firmly in place, however, the life stories of regular users reveal that changes in shopping habits also had the character of a gradually changing process whereby product categories were added over time until the current level was reached.

## **5.4 Conclusion: Major influences on regular consumption of organic food products**

Taking a chronological perspective on factors that influence the regular consumption of organic food, the findings in this chapter have shown that the first marked influence had its roots in the childhood home. In some cases this was an indirect influence in the sense that a concern with healthy eating habits had been a feature of the childhood home, thereby directing attention to the healthy properties of organic foods later in life. In other cases the influence was more direct, parents' own shopping habits with regard to organic foods having been an influence that extended into adult life.

There are age-related differences in influences from childhood in this respect. Only relatively younger regular users reported that parents had influenced their purchasing habits in these ways. Among the older age group of regular users, an interest in health and alternative lifestyles had first arisen in adult life, and these interests had directed their attention towards organic (or biodynamic) food. This generational difference indicates that the modus of influence has changed character over time – from an interest that arises through affiliations with alternative networks and more or less esoteric forms of discourse to one that arises through socialisation to more commonly held values with respect to health, influenced by mainstream mass media.

The life stories of regular users indicate that the phase of the adult life cycle in which a change of mind or habits is most likely to occur is at the point in time when a nuclear family establishes itself. This phase signifies a change from carefree youth to a time when a greater sense of care and responsibility for oneself and family members is likely to arise, bringing with it the need to negotiate and discuss food habits. (It also typically entails a greater disposable income.) Issues of health and proper lifestyle choices arise. The birth of children in the family also constitutes a life cycle event that can change minds, reinforce convictions and, more particularly change shopping habits, if this had not already occurred earlier. Among regular users who had started to purchase organic products before having children, the event of a birth in the family functioned to reinforce convictions regarding the healthy properties of organic food.

Other household events that featured in changes of mind among regular users were the emergence of illness or other health problems in the family. However, only two regular users mentioned illness in this context and the events reported were not presented as the only influence upon the change of mind that had taken place. Rather these events in each case were part of a larger story that included the emergence of an interest in health as such. In general, health *rewards* associated with organic foods are conceptualized by regular users as a form of health promotion rather than as a means of coping with illness.

Friends and acquaintances also appear to influence organic consumers. *Dedicated* regular users usually belong to friendship circles and networks in which organic consumption is perceived as the ordinary food choice. Thus, patterns of mutual recognition and reinforcement exist in these circles. Other

regular users occasionally change purchasing patterns as a consequence of a friend's recommendation, but more frequently it would seem as a result of observing changing food habits. Reciprocal influences take place in this manner between friends, neighbours, workmates and fellow students.

Another strong channel of influence comes from mainstream media coverage. Information about organic farming and foods, including *reasons* and *rewards* associated with organic foods, were reported as having come from the media by most regular users. Interestingly, there was not any single book, magazine, newspaper or television program that was recalled as having made a specific impact. Rather the influence was experienced as having come from "the media" in a broad sense, and appears to have been an indirect but strong and enduring channel of influence.

The majority of regular users recount their change of mind with respect to organic food as having come about in a gradual way, particularly with regard to shopping habits and the establishment of *experience-based rewards* associated with these products (see also section 3.2). Theoretically speaking, Gardner also identifies a sudden and abrupt change of mind, as a process that can occur. Our interpretation of the findings that regular users have generally undergone a gradual change of mind and gradually undertaken changes in shopping habits, is that a relatively consistent conversion from conventional to organic consumption is a difficult and extremely complex process. Historically, it has been hard to obtain a modest amount of organic food, and then only within some few product categories and only by expending considerable resources of time and money. As we have seen, changes in the shopping patterns of regular users have followed apace with the increasing availability of organic products in mainstream shopping venues.

## 6. Conclusions: The character of demand for organic foods

In this final chapter we seek to assemble those elements of the analysis presented in previous chapters that can contribute to delineating the likely character of future demand for organic foods in Denmark. In doing so, we shall attempt to stand back from the close focus upon qualitative differences between consumers pursued thus far, and instead discuss our findings within a somewhat broader perspective. We shall focus mainly upon the mindset and habits of regular users of organic products. Our findings have shown that regular users have a mindset that distinguishes them from other Danish consumers and that they constitute the only user group in which a strong loyalty towards organic products is expressed in their shopping habits. A recent study based upon a representative sample of Danish consumers indicates that 88 % of all organic products sold on the Danish market are sold to consumers who purchase these products on a relatively regular basis. They constitute a little more than one half of all Danish households (O'Doherty Jensen *et al.* 2008). The character of regular users and of the factors that promote and hinder their demand is therefore central to our task.

### 6.1 Organic consumption as a change of mind and habits

This study has sought to explore changes of mind and changes of habits conceived as interrelated processes, based on the assumption that a change of mind leading to the development of a given mindset will entail a corresponding change in habits (Gardner 2004). Our expectation was that the development of a mindset that is positively oriented towards organic food products would lead to changes in shopping habits with respect to these products. Our findings reveal that the picture is somewhat more complex (see Chapter 3), based upon an analysis that distinguishes:

- Conceptions of *value-based rewards* (with reference to health, environmental and ethical issues), as features of this mindset
- Conceptions of *experience-based rewards* (with reference to quality and taste) as features of this mindset and emerging from changes in shopping and consumption habits
- The impact of *real world events* in the organic market upon the shopping habits of consumers.

Among the *value-based* concerns of regular users, that which was most deeply rooted in time, as revealed by their life stories, is a concern with health and with healthy eating habits in everyday life (see Chapter 2). The conviction that organic foods are healthier than other foods is associated with a concern to avoid unwanted substances such as pesticides and additives. Taken together, *value-based rewards* associated with organic products tend to support, enhance and reinforce each other. This is the case insofar as a production system that is better for the environment also tends to be seen as one that yields products that are better for human health. But it is also the case insofar as moral concerns related to personal care and caring for one's family suggest that this should not be done at the cost of mistreating animals and spoiling natural resources. The elements in this mindset can and do vary somewhat from one consumer to another with respect to emphasis, but the mindset of regular users of organic products can nevertheless be said to comprise a relatively coherent set of convictions regarding *value-based rewards* associated with the consumption of organic food products.

This mindset, particularly with regard to the ways in which an interest in health became linked to an interest in the promises associated with organic production, was for the most part a process of growing conviction rather than of sudden realisation. Once this *value-based* mindset was in place, however, one might expect that it would be expressed in decisive changes with regard to shopping habits. Nevertheless, our findings do not support this expectation.

The development of typical shopping patterns involved a modest start, usually with respect to one or two product categories followed by a gradual extension of this range to include more organic

products until the present level was reached. The gradual accumulation of experiences of shopping, cooking and eating organic products underlies the perception of *experience-based rewards* associated with this pattern of consumption. Regular users also share positive conceptions of the quality and taste of organic foods. However, the primary explanation of gradual changes that took place in the shopping habits of those consumers, who are currently regular users, regards changes that occurred in the organic market. The narratives of regular users demonstrate that the increasing availability of these products in mainstream shopping outlets, the expansion of the range available, the perception that organic products had become less expensive over time as compared with conventional products and the perception that relative quality has also improved, all had a major impact upon shopping habits with respect to organic products. *Real world events* in the organic market have thus been decisive for the changes that have taken place in the shopping habits of these consumers. Moreover, further changes and developments in this market are sought by those consumers who are currently regular users of organic food products.

Retrospectively, and from a consumer viewpoint, these developments (increasing supplies, product development, mass distribution, falling relative price levels and improvements in quality) can be seen as having constituted *tipping points* that have enabled consumers to act upon their convictions. Prospectively, and from the viewpoint of producers and distributors within the organic sector, consumer convictions with respect to organic food products present a challenge. More precisely, insofar as our analysis has distinguished between two subgroups of regular users (suggesting the need to distinguish two consumer segments within the group of regular users), there would seem to be two quite distinct sets of such challenges.

- On the one hand are *thrifty* regular users who demand a wider range of standard organic products sold at relatively low prices. In practice, this group frequents supermarkets and discount outlets, and currently purchases most of their organic products in discount outlets at prices they judge to be reasonable and affordable.
- On the other hand are quality-oriented and *dedicated* regular users, who demand the availability of a considerably wider range of high quality specialty products, and for whom price is a less important consideration than the assurance that organic production accords on all points with their strongly felt convictions, including their ethical demands. In practice, this group currently frequents upmarket supermarkets and speciality shops.

The existence of two such segments among Danish consumers is strongly supported by the recent findings of two representative surveys (Økologisk Landsforening 2007b; O'Doherty Jensen *et al.* 2008). Given the small sample size and the method of recruitment employed in the present study, it is perhaps not surprising that the subgroups we have identified appear to describe two ends of spectrum among those who regularly purchase organic foods, the mid-point of which is occupied by those consumers who are neither quite so price conscious nor quite so ethically demanding as the subgroups we have described more fully.

## 6.2 Influences on the development of organic food habits

We have already made it clear that market events external to the household sphere have exerted a powerful influence on the development of changes in the shopping *habits* of regular users of organic products. Here we shall consider the influence of external agents with respect to changes of *mind*, that is to say, to the development of the mindset described in the previous section. We shall also summarise our findings with regard to more informal channels of communication and influence within and between households and to events within that sphere, which also exert influence upon the consumption of organic foods.

It would seem that journalists, as distinguished from marketing experts, are among the external agents who have exerted a strong influence on the development of changes of mind among Danish consumers with respect to their conception of organic products and production. It must be assumed that the dissemination of information about these topics has been a crucial factor in enabling consumers to establish links between their private concerns and those of organic producers. Our findings have revealed that while most informants attribute their information about organic production methods to the influence of the media, and while regular users tend to trust this information, none recall a particular article, programme or other source in recent decades as having influenced them on a particular topic. The partial exception with regard to topic concerns the mistreatment of hens in battery systems of conventional egg production, as disseminated through visual media. The sources of this information are not recalled, however, and do not refer to the ideas of specific experts. It is significant that information appears to have been largely disseminated by means of editorial decisions to allocate of space to these topics in national media networks (*cf.* Larsen 2007). In this respect, the publicity accorded to organic producers and products over many years has significantly differed from the more usual methods and channels of communication whereby food products, with commercial intent, are launched on and promoted within a developing market. It would seem therefore that Danish media have made a significant contribution to changing the minds of Danish consumers, not least perhaps because this information was not seen by consumers as having a commercial intent.

A similar influence going back further in time can be attributed to media coverage of the topics of health, health recommendations, lifestyle and eating habits, with particular regard to the dissemination of the idea that the attainment of good health (and a trim body) is dependent upon lifestyle choices. The influence of health discourses in recent decades upon the food habits of Danish consumers is clearly indicated in our findings with respect to those who are currently regular users of organic foods – and less clearly so among those we have termed ‘health-oriented’ occasional users. We have also found a generational difference that reflects the influence of health discourse with specific regard to eating habits. Younger regular users, who had grown up during 1970s or later, all accorded their interest in healthy eating habits to influences from their parents. Relatively older regular users, in contrast, did not attribute their interest in healthy eating habits to influences from childhood, but to influences that had occurred later in life.

Turning to informal channels of influence in everyday life, it can be noted that regular users of organic foods are, generally speaking, reluctant to recommend the consumption of organic foods to people beyond the sphere of their family, and do not for the most part see their own food preferences as having been influenced by the direct recommendation of friends or acquaintances. While this pattern might be seen as an acknowledgement of the intensely private character of food preferences, it transpires that the terms in which this reluctance is expressed are borrowed from religious discourse, indicating that beliefs and moral concerns are tacitly at play with regard to organic foods. References to ‘preaching’ about it or ‘going out on a mission’, fear of being ‘holier-than-thou’, ironic reference to the ‘half-saved’ and other such phrases, suggest that the basis of convictions held by regular users may be somewhat tenuous. Possibly they are experienced as being difficult to defend. No such reluctance is found among *dedicated* regular users, however, who function as advocates of organic consumption and are seemingly quite willing to present their arguments to acquaintances, to promote the procurement of organic products among buyers and distributors, and to exert influence on organic producers.

Some specific events in particular households were associated with reinforcing existing convictions or with resolving to change shopping habits with respect to increasing consumption of organic foods. These included the birth of a baby, the diagnosis of a chronic illness such as allergy, the decision to change eating habits due to a problem of weight gain or a sudden improvement in financial resources due to a rise in income. A more general pattern that was apparent in the life stories of regular users was that a decision to abandon the carefree and unstable eating patterns characteristic of a more youthful phase of the

lifecycle had usually taken place at the point in time when these matters were negotiated with a new partner, a household was being established or a couple had started a family. This was the phase of the life cycle in which the topic of health as an important consideration with respect to eating habits, and that of organic foods as a healthier option with respect to food choice, were negotiated and discussed between family members.

### 6.3 The basis of loyalty towards organic food products

The basis of loyalty towards organic products was analysed on two levels.

- Loyalty towards retailers that stock organic variants within a given range of product categories, on the basis of which choices are made between supermarket chains, discount chains or other outlets
- Loyalty towards the organic variant within a given product category exercised while shopping at a given venue.

Regular users exhibit loyalty to particular retailers with a view to maximising their access to a range of organic products. On this point there are clear differences between the shopping patterns of *dedicated* and other regular users of organic foods. The former group has a generalized preference for products of high quality and for organic variants within a wide range of product categories. They tend to purchase these preferred products and to maximise their chances of obtaining them by choosing to shop in upmarket supermarkets and specialty stores that stock a wide range of organic products<sup>30</sup>. Other regular users tend to buy organic variants within three or four product categories and relatively often purchase their preferred variants. They maximise their chances of obtaining the products they seek at reasonable prices by choosing to buy these products in discount markets. While both groups monitor the available stock in other retail chains, only the latter group also does so with a view to comparing prices.

We have examined loyalty towards organic products as exercised during a given shopping trip by accompanying our informants and observing the substitution strategies they employ<sup>31</sup>. Our analysis reveals that for a variety of reasons, most of which are related to lack of availability, *treason* (the choice of a conventional variant) or *surrender* (giving up the attempt to find the sought for product) frequently occurs among most, if not all, regular users. *Close substitution* (of one organic variant for another) as well as *re-try* and *re-location* are strategies that more often occur (and only for some product categories) among *dedicated* regular users. One reason why *close substitution* is an option for dedicated users is that their choice of shopping venue also maximises their chances of being able to choose among organic variants. We find that loyalty towards organic products, as expressed in substitution practices, is dependent upon loyalty towards retailers – a choice that is usually exercised prior to any given shopping expedition. In the light of the fact that regular users monitor available stocks of organic products, this pattern strongly suggests that retail chains can switch shop-loyalty among regular users by means of their policies with respect to organic products. This observation does not apply to occasional users. They do not choose shopping venues with reference to the available stock of organic products and in the event that a preferred organic product is sold out, it is readily substituted by a conventional variant.

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<sup>30</sup> The chain most frequently mentioned in this context was IRMA. This chain only has outlets on Zealand, the geographical area within which this study was carried out. Other ...

<sup>31</sup> While much information about loyalty was obtained in the course of a main interview with informants, they were also encouraged to explain their options with respect to product choice both while shopping and in the course of a further 'debriefing' interview.

## 6.4 Barriers to increasing demand

Our findings indicate that main barriers, which hinder current demand and potential increases in future demand, are:

- Relative price differences between organic and conventional products
- Limited assortment of available products
- Poor quality of available vegetable and dairy products (freshness being a problem)
- Conceptual barriers and limited information about meat products
- Failure to develop the principals upon which organic agriculture are currently based, with particular reference to distribution.

Premium prices tend to hinder demand in all user groups distinguished in the present study with the single exception of *dedicated* regular users.

Among non-users and ‘taste-oriented’ occasional users, this factor operates on a level that tends to exclude consideration of the option of buying organic products. In practice, however, as we have seen, members of both these groups do buy organic products for different reasons on a far from regular basis, including occasions when price differences are seen to be negligible or are unimportant for the reason that the product is not purchased often.<sup>32</sup>

Among *thrifty* regular users, this factor operates at the level of choosing a retailer that ensures the prospect of being able to buy “cheap” as compared to “expensive” organic products. In practice this entails that organic products are relatively frequently purchased in discount chains. This option in turn limits the product categories within which organic products can be currently purchased. At the level of product choice, consideration is given to relative price differences (organic as compared to conventional carrots or chicken) or to the relative infrequency with which a product is bought, rendering price difference less important. Price comparisons undertaken on the spot can and sometimes do underlie the adoption of one or another substitution strategy. In general, however, *thrifty* regular users express much satisfaction about the fact that relative price differences between organic and conventional products are less than they used to be. They differ markedly on this point from occasional users, including those who are ‘health-oriented’, among whom a fear of “throwing money out the window” appears to be deeply ingrained.

Our analysis of the life stories of informants reveals that a thrifty orientation as exhibited in current shopping habits most often has its roots in a similar orientation as learned from childhood, and may or may not be related to the current economic resources of the household. A change of mind or habits with respect to this orientation does not therefore seem to be a likely event, except in those cases in which a rising income leads to changes in shopping habits.

However, a further observation might be made with regard to the preference for “cheap” organic products. One point of information that does not seem to be widely disseminated among consumers concerns the relationship between production costs and retail prices. Given the character of value-based rewards associated with organic products among regular users, particularly with regard to ethical issues, there would seem to be a basis for promoting insight into the need for prices that are fair to producers among the members of this group. This consideration does not apply to occasional users, however. Price differences appear to be the major reason why the ‘health-oriented’ subgroup does not increase their demand for organic products, while no value-based rewards are associated with organic products among the ‘taste-oriented’ subgroup. Occasional users are therefore unlikely to increase their demand as long as marked price differences between convention and organic products remain in place.

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<sup>32</sup> Other reasons are that purchases are made: by coincidence without adverting to the label, because conventional variants are sold out, or with a view to trying the taste of new (processed) products. ‘Taste-oriented’ occasional users are first and foremost oriented towards the sensory pleasures of food and have little or no interest in the issues of health or ethical consumption.

The current range of product categories and variants presents a strong barrier to increasing demand among all of the more eager regular users. *Thrifty* regular users demand a wider range of standard organic products, including a wider range of fresh and frozen produce, meat products and processed products (sold at reasonably low prices). *Dedicated* regular users are more satisfied with the range of fruit and vegetables obtainable in the shopping venues they frequent. They demand a considerably wider range of high quality specialty products, including spices and the ready availability of a variety fresh meat products and a wider variety of meat types and cuts. On this point we conclude that the currently available assortment of organic products constitutes a major barrier to meeting the potential demand among all regular users.

In much the same way as price, the ‘quality’ of organic products appears to constitute a barrier that operates on different levels. These refer to: (a) general characteristics of ‘organic products’ viewed as arising from an organic production system and a given chain of distribution, (b) product categories and characteristics associated with a given retailer or retail chain, and (c) specific product characteristics (taste, freshness, level and kind of processing etc.) that vary from one product category to another and are assessed by consumers in concrete situations on the basis of their experience. Since we have already indicated our findings with respect to choice of shopping venues, we shall briefly discuss our findings with respect to the other points.

Regular users demand that the specific quality characteristics of an organic product should, at a minimum, be at least as good as its conventional counterpart. Although they experience the quality of organic products as having improved over time, the actual quality of a given product is assessed at point of purchase. Particular attention is paid to the freshness of fruit and vegetables and to the sell-by dates of dairy products (often giving rise to the substitution strategies of *surrender* or *treason*). *Thrifty* regular users tend to express more dissatisfaction with specific quality characteristics than do *dedicated* users. Among ‘taste-oriented’ occasional users and non-users dissatisfaction tends to be generalised to the view that quality differences do not present any reason why organic products should be preferred. With some exceptions, particularly regarding dairy products, this view specifically regards the taste of organic products.

With the partial exception of the *dedicated* subgroup, a particular barrier is found among regular users with regard to the consumption of organic meat products. Conceptual barriers are at stake here regarding animal products more generally. Firstly, organic production systems appear to be widely conceived and positively assessed as excluding the use of synthetic pesticides, a factor that is readily seen as entailing a difference between organic and conventional vegetable products. The differences between production systems would seem to be less clearly conceived with regard to the production of animal products. The exception on this point concerns battery production of eggs in conventional systems. Secondly, the *value-based reward* most often associated with a preference for organic animal products is that of animal welfare. On this point, however, other production systems are seen as providing perfectly acceptable substitutes. Whereas organic fruit and vegetables tend to be viewed by regular users as special products for which no convincing substitute product exists, this is by no means the case for all with respect to organic meat products. The same pattern among occasional users is found with regard to eggs, for some of whom all production systems other than battery production are seen as acceptable and interchangeable substitutes. The conceptual barrier at issue reflects a lack of information about differences between production systems and is probably reinforced by premium prices on organic meat products. However, as we have seen, these products are among those for which current supply does not meet the level of potential demand. It would therefore seem to be very likely that more information about organic animal production would further increase this demand.

At first sight, supply appears to be the only barrier that hinders increasing demand among *dedicated* regular users. The members of this group are highly motivated in their pursuit of quality on all levels, and are willing to expend considerable resources of time and money on sourcing their valued food

preferences, including organic and fair trade foods. They are the people who most clearly and forcefully espouse the *value-based rewards* associated with the consumption of organic foods. They are also highly motivated to develop the universe of possible consumption practices by pioneering the purchase of both food and non-food products from sustainable production systems. Insofar as these consumers can be seen as representing a core group among regular users of organic products and as trend-setters with respect to the development of consumption patterns, they need to be taken very seriously indeed in any assessment of likely developments with respect to future demand for organic foods. For them, organic production systems are not viewed as an ideal that has been attained, but rather as a starting point for a better system of food provisioning. Organic producers would therefore potentially be open to very critical appraisal on any points that appeared to represent a compromise with the values presently associated with organic production (health promotion, environmental sustainability and ethical issues, including animal welfare). They would also be open to criticism on points that represent a failure to adapt and develop systems of production and distribution: fair trade, use of energy resources, local and global food security and food sovereignty.

## 6.5 Potentialities for future demand: an extrapolation

The present study has yielded nuanced qualitative data from the perspective of life histories of consumers who regularly purchase and consume organic products, as compared to those who occasionally or “never” do so. This provides a basis for some extrapolations regarding potential future demand among Danish consumers, which will later be supplemented by quantitative findings.

Many factors indicate that the demand for organic products is likely to increase among regular users in Denmark. Among these are:

- *Value-based rewards* are associated with organic products by regular users
- *Experience-based rewards* with reference to quality and taste are also perceived as having taken place
- Price differences between conventional and organic products are seen as being lower today than formerly
- More variants in a wider range of product categories are currently demanded
- Major barriers to increasing demand regard hindrances on the supply side, rather than among consumers (with the partial exceptions of perceived price premiums and lack of information regarding animal husbandry).

Moreover, the current worldwide focus on the so-called ‘obesity epidemic’ render it likely that health discourses in mass media with specific regard to eating habits will continue to support consumer interest in the topics of healthy eating habits and healthier options with regard to product choice. No evidence currently supports the view that Danish consumers are likely to switch their present allegiance to organic food products in favour of competing options such as, for example, ‘functional foods.’<sup>33</sup> With regard to animal welfare, the findings of this study indicate that, on the one hand, consumers are strongly emotionally involved in the issue of mistreatment of animals. On the other hand, they also appear to be relatively poorly informed about the distinguishing features of animal husbandry in organic production as compared to other production systems. This issue also presents a challenge to organic producers.

Current environmental threats, however, are likely to direct increasing attention, not only to production systems and their energy use, but also towards criticism of the food miles involved in distribution. This must be regarded as presenting a major challenge to primary producers, processors,

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<sup>33</sup> The existing literature on this topic is limited with respect to Danish consumers, but supports this contention.

distributors and retailers, not least because *dedicated* regular users are likely to become increasingly interested in how these stakeholders respond to this challenge.

Among the more difficult challenges facing the Danish organic sector as a whole is that of addressing the issue of conflicting priorities exhibited in the shopping habits of regular users. The present study indicates that possible marketing strategies (with respect to product development, quality, assortment, price and distribution) would have markedly different impacts upon the two segments of regular users identified in this study: *dedicated* and other regular users.

A strategy focused upon the development of standard products, including processed products, produced on contract at relatively low prices to discount and other retailers would in all likelihood appeal to those who regularly buy organic products and who exhibit a strongly *thrifty* orientation in their shopping habits. The findings of this study clearly indicate that this strategy as pursued hitherto has been successful in increasing demand from consumers who were formerly occasional or non-users, among whom price was and continues to be a barrier. It can therefore be confidently assumed that this strategy would also tend to increase demand among those who currently buy organic products occasionally or never. Indeed, the success of this strategy in Denmark may well provide inspiration to marketing strategists elsewhere.

A strategy of this kind, however, would singularly fail to meet the demands of *dedicated* regular users, and presumably also some proportion of other regular users. Moreover, our findings indicate that failure to meet the demands of this dedicated group could have a serious negative impact upon future demand for organic products. These demands, particularly with regard to environmental and ethical issues, call for serious consideration in the development of any future marketing strategy. In so far as their demands for high quality specialty products and their *value-based* demands with respect to the development of the food production and distribution are not addressed, it would seem likely that the basis for loyalty towards and trust in the Danish organic sector could be undermined, leading to a more widespread loss of trust in the longer term.

It can be noted that trust in the organic sector tends to be taken for granted by regular users in Denmark, but not by non-users or by consumers whom we have termed 'taste-oriented' occasional users. Among the latter groups, we have found that negative media coverage with reference to food scandals and fraud in the organic sector tends to reinforce views to the effect that there are no good reasons for buying organic products. Regular users, in contrast, as well as the group we have termed 'health-oriented' occasional users, tend to see such stories as referring to isolated incidents and by no means characteristic of the organic sector as such. Given the character of the *value-based* mindset among regular users, the maintenance of basic loyalty and trust of this kind must be understood as constituting a pre-condition of their tendency to accord value to organic products and to pay a premium price for obtaining them. Reluctance to enter into informal discussion on these topics in everyday life may indicate, however, that many regular users do not feel able or prepared to back up their views by means of argument (*cf.* section 3.3). Loyalty and trust may therefore be more tenuous than revealed by this study. While it provides no evidence that basic loyalty and trust among regular users is likely to be undermined by negative media coverage of the kind that has hitherto been reported, it could be expected that the critical voices of *dedicated* regular users would have a more serious impact upon the currently widespread trust in organic production among regular users.

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## APPENDIX I

**TABLE A: Allocation to user groups based on responses to the screening questionnaire (DENMARK)**

REGULAR USERS	ID	Dairy Products	Bread	Egg	Fruit/Vegetables
	Regular user A	One or more times / week	No	Less then 1 time / week	One or more times / week
	Regular user B	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week
	Regular user C	One or more times /week	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week	One or more times / week
	Regular user D	One or more times /week	Less then 1 time / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week
	Regular user E	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	No
	Regular user F	One or more times / week	No*	One or more times / week	One or more times / week
	Regular user G	One or more times / week	One or more times / week	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week
	Regular user H	One or more times / week	Less then 1 time / week	No	One or more times / week
OCCASIONAL USERS	ID	Dairy Products	Bread	Egg	Fruit/Vegetables
	Occasional user	Less then 1 time /week	No	No	No
	Occasional user	No	Less then 1 time / week	No	Less then 1 time / week
	Occasional user	No	Less then 1 time / week	No	No
	Occasional user	Less then 1 time / week	No	Less then 1 time / week	No
	Occasional user	Less then 1 time / week	Less then 1 time / week	No	Less then 1 time / week
NON-USERS	ID	Dairy Products	Bread	Egg	Fruit/Vegetables
	Non user A	No	No	No	No
	Non user B	No	No	No	No
	Non user C	No	No	No	No
	Non user D	No	No	No	No

\* Bakes organic bread

**TABLE B: Analytical allocation to the two user groups among regular users that transpired in analysis.**

REGULAR USERS	ID	The consumer chooses shops in order to maximize possibility of purchasing a very large amount of org. products?	The consumer actively searches for new arenas in which e.g. ethical consumption is made possible?	The consumer has friends and networks in which organic topics and habits are natural and reinforcing.	Does consumer try to re-recommend or influence people outside nearest family to purchase organic food?	Range of organic products purchased among the dedicated regular users.	Does consumer exclude many organic products because of price premium?
	Regular user A	NO	NO	NO	NO		YES
	Regular user B*	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES. Rye bread, milk, butter, eggs, fruit, fresh vegetables (box scheme), frozen vegetables, coffee, sugar, flour, ketchup, olive oil, sliced meats, sausage, minced meat.	NO
	Regular user C*	YES, all though meat (chicken and large cattle pieces) is not bought organically in shops, but from producers that are renown for animal friendly production.	YES	YES	YES	YES. Rye bread, milk, butter, cheese, eggs, fruit, fresh vegetables, tinned tomatoes, coffee, flour, rice, ketchup, olive oil, sliced meats, minced meat. Grows own organic vegetables in kitchen garden.	TO SOME EXTENT (in particular meat products.)
	Regular user D	NO	NO	NO	Not answered – but probably not.		YES
	Regular user E	NO	NO	NO	NO		YES
	Regular user F*	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES. Milk, eggs, fruit, fruit juice, preserves, fresh vegetables, coffee, tea, sugar, herbs, oat rice, sliced meats, minced meat, chicken, lamb * Bakes own organic bread.	NO
	Regular user G	NO	NO	POSSIBLY	NO		YES
	Regular user H	NO	NO	NO	Not answered – but probably not		YES

\* Regular users interpreted as dedicated regular users and referred to as such in the text.