

Consumption of Organic Foods from a Life History Perspective:

An Exploratory Study among British Consumers

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1. Exploring the Development of Organic consumption in Britain

1.1 Objectives

As part of the EU-funded research project: QualitativeLowInputFood, this study and the similar qualitative studies taking place simultaneously in Italy and Denmark, aim to understand the future demand for organic food in the European context.

The more specific objectives of the qualitative studies are: (1) to understand the development of conceptions of organic food products and production methods, (2) to identify the factors which trigger the original motivation to purchase organic food products and the subsequent development of conviction about organic food as well as motivations to change or expand the selection of product categories.

Previous studies, such as Padel's (2005) 'Exploring the gap between attitudes and behaviour', have provided snapshots of the organic consumer in an attempt to develop a typography of organic shoppers. This study, in difference, has adopted an innovative approach and has aimed to better understand the consumer through a qualitative analysis of biographical narratives.

Sample and Population

This study was designed to obtain detailed in-depth quantitative material from consumers and therefore the sample size was deliberately limited. The sample in the UK consisted of 18 households drawn equally from two geographical regions in the UK; London, the capital city and an average sized city; Bristol, in the South West of England.

In each household the person mainly responsible for food shopping decisions (principal shopper) was recruited for an in depth semi structured interview. This interview aimed to draw out a biographical narrative which detailed important events that influenced decisions relevant to food consumption. It was intended that a secondary member of each household (such as husband/wife, partner, parent, son/daughter or close friend) would also be interviewed as a validation procedure, focusing on the decisions of the principal shopper. To supplement the interview data and for purposes of triangulation, we aimed to observe and if consented, film, a shopping trip with the principal shopper in the household.

London, being a vast, diverse metropolis with a population exceeding 7 million, was an interesting choice to obtain the quota of consumers for this study, and resulted in a rich and varied sample. It also proved challenging to get the attention of consumers in the many shopping contexts within this bustling, urban environment.

Bristol, in contrast, surrounded by rich agricultural regions such as Somerset and Gloucestershire has a relatively slower pace. The city which has a diverse population of approximately 410,000 has been defined as an average sized UK city. With a reputation as having a thriving local food culture, Bristol accesses a wide range of local and organic produce from the surrounding regions. Bristol is also home to the Soil Association (Britain's official organic certification body, as well as environmental charity promoting sustainable, organic farming and human health.)

Initial screening for research recruits varied between the two geographical locations. In London, participating consumers have been recruited at 'Greenland's' a small health food shop in Greenwich, in a large supermarket in an out of centre Greenwich retail park, Sainsbury's, and at an inner city fine food/farmers market in London Spital-fields.

Some locations were completely unsuccessful for recruitment in London, such as the extra large Asda store in Charlton, South East London – where shoppers refused to even stop to find out what the research was about. This Asda store proved to be an extremely hectic environment with a diverse demographic. Additionally, a small Marks and Spencer was unsuccessful for recruiting purposes as most people who were willing to speak claimed they did not really have time to participate in the study.

At 'Greenland's', the small health food shop in Greenwich, the level of interest was high and most shoppers who were approached completed the screening stage of the recruitment process. Some expressed interest for the subject matter but regretted that time was a major constraint and declined participation. Other shoppers wanted to know the purposes of the research before committing themselves to take part. These people were often enthusiastic about food and had strong opinions they wanted to share. Some shoppers were doubtful about how interesting a case they would make and felt uncomfortable about participation. Reasons for this doubt were not explored in depth.

At the farmers/fine food market in London, consumers were often keen to be interviewed for the research. Generally, shopping appeared to be at a relatively leisurely pace, and shoppers were found to be interested in speaking about food as well as enthusiastic about the subject matter of organic food.

In the Sainsbury's supermarket in London, shoppers approached were quite open and willing to complete the screening questionnaire but were reserved about committing to an interview before receiving additional information via email. Recruiting in this scenario was more rushed and less relaxed than at the health food shop and the farmers' market.

Recruiting non organic consumers was attempted at a variety of locations in London. This included a large Asda supermarket, a discount supermarket (Lidl), a suburban food market and a small, suburban supermarket. Success at recruiting the non organic consumer group proved to be very difficult, explaining the lower number of non organic consumer participants in this study (3) than was originally planned (4).

In Bristol, the average sized UK city, recruitment of consumers was carried out at the central, weekly farmers' market, at a large supermarket (Asda) and through referral from other key agents. For example at the farmers' market certain producers suggested interviewing their customers.

Interviews have taken place between February and August 2007. The incentive to take part in the research was in the form of cash and amounted to the sum of £30.00 being paid for a principal interview and an additional £15.00 paid to the household if the secondary interview was also carried out.

The sample consists of quotas of regular, occasional and non consumers of organic food. Recruitment of consumers for the sample was made by Natasha Ayres in both London and Bristol.

All interviews with principal and secondary subjects took place at the respondents' homes and ranged in length between 40 minutes and 90 minutes. Most interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes.

Principal subjects were asked to be accompanied on a shopping trip after the main interview, and this usually took place at a local shop where the consumer would shop quite frequently. Participants were informed that they should shop during this visit as they would normally do so. In some of the cases this shopping trip was filmed, for purposes of triangulation. However, some participants did not wish to be filmed and in these cases observational notes were compiled instead.

In some cases the secondary interview was not conducted due to recruitment problems such as difficulty in making contact to arrange interview, time constraints, desire for privacy as well as less interest in the subject matter than the principal subject.

Shopping trip locations included farmers' markets in Bristol and London, small local health food shops, ethnic food groceries in London, small, local grocery shops, independent organic butchers, a massive Asda supermarket, and a number of small chain supermarkets (Coop, Somerfield, Sainsbury's, Marks and Spencer).

The following tables show details about each of the three consumer groups and the case studies carried out.

Table 1- Regular Organic Consumers interviewed

REGULAR CONSUMERS	ID	Age	Gender	Secondary Subject Characteristics	Household Composition	Location and filming of shopping trip
	A (London)	41	Female	Husband (age= 40)	Couple, children <11	No film obtained – due to time constraints
	B (Bristol)	33	Female	Husband (age 36)	Couple, children <11	Film of shopping in local Somerfield – Bristol
	C (London)	35	Female	Husband (age 36)	Couple, children <11	Film of shopping at London Farmers Market
	D (Bristol)	35	Male	Wife (age 35)	Couple, no children	No film obtained. Shopping trip at local Greengrocers
	E (London)	35	Male	Wife (age 35)	Couple, no children	Film of shopping at local precinct of shops in London – Health Food shop, Greengrocers and Butchers
	F (London)	39	Female	Partner (45)	Empty nesting couple	No Film obtained – participant declined
	G (Bristol)	31	Female	Husband (age 31)	Couple, no children	Film of shopping at large Asda in Bristol

H (London)	54	Female	Close friend (35)	Empty nesting female	Film of shopping at local Coop in London
I (Bristol)	49	Female	Son (age 16)	Single, children 11>	No film obtained – shopping was observed at Bristol Farmers market

Table 2 – Occasional Organic Consumers interviewed

OCCASIONAL CONSUMERS	ID	Age	Gender	Secondary Subject Characteristics	Household Composition	Location and filming of shopping trip
	A (Bristol)	53	Female	N/A	Couple, children <11	No film obtained – shopping was observed at Bristol Farmers market
	B (Bristol)	35	Male	House-mate (age 32)	Single, no children	No film obtained – subject declined
	C (London)	48	Female	Husband (age 45)	Couple, children <11	Film of shopping at local Health Food Shop in London suburbs
	D (Bristol)	33	Female	Mother (age 65)	Couple, no children	Film of shopping at Bristol Farmers Market
	E (London)	33	Female	N/A	Young Couple, no children	No film obtained – subject declined
	F (London)	62	Male	Partner (61)	Empty nesting couple	No film obtained – subject declined

Table 3 – Non Organic Consumers interviewed

NON – ORGANIC CONSUMERS	ID	Age	Gender	Secondary Subject Characteristics	Household Composition	Location and filming of shopping trip
	A (London)	30	Male	N/A	Single, no children	Still photos obtained – problems with camera
	B (Bristol)	46	Female	N/A	Empty Nesting Couple	No film obtained – subject declined
	C (Bristol)	32	Male	N/A	Single, no children	No film obtained – subject too busy

The quota is as follows:

Household composition:

- 5 young couples without children
- 4 households with children <11years
- 4 empty nesting households
- 3 single households without children
- 2 households with children >11 years

Consumer organic characteristics:

- 9 regular organic consumers
- 6 occasional organic consumers
- 3 non organic consumers

Gender:

- 12 female
- 6 male

All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Data analysis was carried out with assistance from NVivo, a processing software tool which aids the coding, organisation and analysis of qualitative material.

1.2 The development of the organic market in Britain

The origins of the market for organic products in Britain lie in the late 1980s. The development of the organic food market was initially supply driven, but since the mid-90s appears to be mostly demand driven (Michelsen et al., 2001). On one hand, there was a series of widespread scandals involving food safety issues (for example, the suggestion in 1988 by Health Minister, Edwina Curry, that the majority of eggs in the UK were contaminated with salmonella; and most importantly, emerging concerns of possible links between BSE and the human disease vCJD). On the other, a number of committed pioneer organic producers had begun to consolidate and expand distribution channels through independent retailers and health food shops. These greater consumer concerns provided opportunities for multiple retailers to enter the market for organic products early in the 1990s, especially as statutory support for the production method had been established by EU Regulation 2092/91. Michelsen et al. (2001) mention that the strong presence of the multiples in the sector may have increased confidence both for producers to convert to organic farming and for the consumer. They retrenched somewhat in the middle of the decade, but all major multiples now have a commitment to supply and if possible extend organic food products on offer.

Unlike other European countries, from these origins, growth in the market for organic products in the UK has been sustained and continuous. Currently, the value of the retail market is the second largest in Europe after Germany (Padel et al., 2008), and growth prospects apparently remain very strong. However, despite some substantial increase in the supply base, expansion of domestic production of organic food has never been sufficiently rapid to catch up with consumer demand, and consequently there is a high level of import dependence, which varies considerably by product.

Certification is provided by private sector organisations with governmental supervision. UKROFS (United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards) was established in 1987 at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) to set a common minimum standard for the UK, prior to the introduction of the common European Regulation (EEC) 2092/91. On implementation of Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 in the UK, UKROFS was designated the Competent Authority for administering the EC Regulation (Michelsen et al., 2001). Unlike many other European counterparts the UK has no common logo for organic production other than the term 'organic' itself (Hamm and Gronefeld, 2004). The need for a 'unique' or clearly identifiable symbol was mentioned by consumers as one way to simplify the shopping for and choosing of organic products (Padel and Foster, 2006).

The statistics which describe the organic market in the United Kingdom are fragmentary and inconsistent; some come from market research organisations such as TNS or Mintel, whereas others are derived from surveys or expert opinion. Nevertheless, they are sufficient to provide an overall impression of the dynamics of organic food market development. Since 1999 the Soil Association's has annually published an Organic Market Report providing numerical details on the production sector, wholesale and retail market values, market channels, levels of imports, and consumer information, although not all information is available for all years.

From the legal requirement to certify organic and in-conversion land, there is a good basis of information on areas, farm businesses, cropping and livestock enterprises. Significant growth in production began in 1997, when the area under organic management doubled in a single year; from then, the average annual rate of increase was over 60%, up to a peak of 730,000 hectares in 2002; subsequently, the growth rate levelled off, there was a slight decline (particularly in the highlands of Scotland), and currently almost 615,000 hectares are under organic management. This surge in area was partly due to the introduction of conversion aids for organic farmers in 1997, and their subsequent significant enhancement in 2001. Not all of this growth can be explained by the introduction of the Organic Aid Scheme, however, as low rates of support payment led to relatively low uptake of the scheme; the crisis in conventional agriculture (due to the strong pound and BSE concerns) may have contributed to early growth levels.

Retail sales of organic food rose from £92 million in 1992 to an estimated £260 million in 1997, although that still accounted for less than 1% of total retail food sales (Mintel, 1997). In 1997/98, the wholesale value of the main organic commodities produced in the United Kingdom was £63 million; by category, dairy products accounted for 18%, meat for 9%, eggs for 6%, cereals for 16% and fruit and vegetables for 51% (Soil Association, 1999). The same report shows that in 1998/99, this spectrum was broadly reflected in overall retail spending (worth £260 million) by category; fruit, vegetables and herbs accounted for 45% of retail spending, cereals and baked products for 13%, dairy products for 14%, meat for 4% and eggs for 2% (the remaining 23% was accounted for by processed products – especially baby food – and beverages). The estimated import content was approximately 70% in total; 80% of fruit and vegetables and 50% of cereals were imported. Major constraints on supply at the time were noted as deficient dedicated processing capacity, and reluctance of multiple retailers to accord priority to purchasing domestic production. There was at this time 100% domestic self-sufficiency in organic meat, but total sales in 1997 only accounted for £13 million. Some considerable improvements have subsequently occurred: for example, in 2000 major multinational food companies (including Heinz and Nestlé) began processing organic variants of their major brands. Despite substantial output growth, however, as noted the expansion of consumer demand since the late 1990s has outstripped even the rapid capacity extension. The most recent statistics relate to the imported content of sales by major multiple retailers in 2005-06 (Soil Association, 2007). 100% of eggs and 96% of dairy

products were sourced from within the UK; however, percentages were significantly lower for meat (79%), vegetables (73%), salads (38%) and fruit (15%) respectively, although in most cases small increases in domestic production helped close the gap with demand.

Fruit and vegetables remain the majority of organic retail sales, accounting for 35% of the total; dairy products (including eggs) take up 22%; cereal and baked products, 14%; meat, meat products and fish, 8%; and baby foods, 5% (Key Note Ltd., 2006). Growth in all categories has been steady, and in constant price terms (deflated by the All Food element of the UK Retail Prices Index) overall growth in the market since 2000 has been around 10% annually. According to Soil Association estimates, the current value of organic retail sales is just over £1.9 billion, and accounts for 2.5% of total food retail sales (this figure improves on previous estimates, since supermarket non-food sales are now excluded from the base from which it is calculated).

The majority of consumer purchases of organic food are made through multiple retailers: 75% occur through this channel (Soil Association, 2007). However, there has been strong recent growth in sales through independent shops (now 18%) and by producers (7%), which reverses past trends in which most growth occurred within multiple retailer channels. Box schemes and mail orders grew by an estimated 53% between 2005 and 2006. Significantly, a higher proportion of sales were from local sources via this channel, so that for producer-operated schemes, 92% of meat, 74% of vegetables and 80% of salad vegetables were either from own production or other local farms. However, most rapid growth occurred through non-producer box schemes, in which 55% of meat, 27% of vegetables and 28% of salad vegetables were sourced from local farms. Farm shops grew less rapidly between 2005 and 2006, and their share of the overall retail market has continued to decline; sales through farmers' markets were static over the same period. Catering (through public sector canteens and the restaurant sector) remains negligible, in comparison with the volume of retail sales.

According to Key Note Ltd. (2006), regular buyers of organic food are most likely to be female; in either the younger age groups (aged below 24) or middle aged (45-54); in households with young children (under 9 years of age); and in the Southern half of Britain (in the South East region, consumers are 40% more likely to be regular consumers than not; in the South West region, consumers are 49% more likely). Individuals from social class A are more likely to be regular consumers, but so too are those from the lowest class, E. Key issues for consumers appear to be mixed: "different consumers display different incentives to purchase, whether it is primarily concern over pesticides, animal welfare, or the belief that organic food is simply better for you. It seems that these values are not transferable to all product areas and that consumers are selective in their approach" (Soil Association, 2007: 41).

2. Life Histories regarding Food Habits

Food is an essential part of our intimate everyday lives. Understanding the consumer and what, how, why and where people consume food is essential in addressing aspects of the problem about the future consumption of food. In particular understanding consumer culture surrounding 'organically produced' food can address questions about how the production and consumption of food in the future can link human with ecological health.

In contemporary society food plays a role of colossal importance. Food is traded and marketed within a powerful political arena ridden with conflict, crisis and inequality and the future of food is uncertain and unstable (Lang 2004)¹. Our global food economy is dominated by giant conglomerates which market an array of processed food and convenient food products available all year round. As a result of this, the environmental sustainability of the food production systems and the quality and nutritional value of food produced are challenged.

Food habits relate to aspects of food culture; activities of food sourcing (which could be shopping, service catering or growing vegetables/rearing chickens), food preparation, and cooking in the household, and the negotiation and dynamics of meals and eating. Current food habits are understood in relation to a person's food history, previous habits, events and life-cycle changes that have influenced present norms. It is of particular interest to identify how the food habits of regular consumers of organic food change over time in comparison to those of occasional and non- organic food consumers. By doing so it is expected that insights into understanding future organic consumption habits will be gained.

2.1 Current Food Habits

Consumers who can be described as food engaged were recruited for this study. As expected regular, occasional and non organic food consumers' narratives show that tasty food of good quality is something that the consumers in our sample across all organic groups currently attach a great importance to and pay attention to. Each household has their own distinctive food values and food culture. Almost all consumers' food biographies articulate a change from the 'traditional' food habits of the past in comparison to the diversely influenced contemporary food habits of the current period.

Shopping Habits

Narratives from all three consumer groups suggest that food shopping is an activity which involves thoughtful negotiation.

'I guess shopping is something that is more than just functional but we think about it and enjoy it'²

Regular Organic food consumers

Shopping Locations

Shopping habits of our sample of consumers are often creative and resourceful. With such an abundance of choice of shopping venues in both the London and Bristol, shopping locations and general shopping habits vary considerably between and within organic consumer groups and life cycle phases.

Major differences between regular consumers with regard to current shopping habits are generally characterised by variations in shopping venues and differing values associated with the shopping experience. What emerges from the narratives is two subsets of regular organic consumers. On the one hand there is a group of 'alternatively orientated' shoppers who aspire to shop in a variety of locations which are alternatives to supermarkets, and on the other hand a group of

¹ Lang, T and Heasman, M (2004) *Food Wars: The Global Battle for Mouths, Minds and Markets*, London: Earthscan.

² Regular Organic Consumer B

‘supermarket orientated’ consumers who articulate a preference to shop in mainstream supermarkets.

The first subset of regular organic food consumers in our sample have a preference for shopping in specialist or alternative locations such as health food shops and farmers markets where they gain a more personal shopping experience, can access an extensive range of organic goods and receive a degree of expert food product knowledge. This subset of consumers almost always articulate that they also inevitably have to shop in supermarkets to source specific items but what distinguishes them from the second subset of consumers is a common attitude of resistance to supermarkets, a self imposed challenge to this popular convention or habit and a view that alternative shopping arenas are favourable.

‘I try and do my main shopping at the farmers’ market which is where I met you... if I could use just the farmers markets and small organic shops I would’³

‘Everyone that works [in the organic supermarket] is really nice it’s one of those shops that feels really pleasant shopping there and it makes you feel relaxed. They have a big basket of apples by the door which you can help yourself to while you’re shopping. All the little touches make it quite easy...and they’re really nice to the girls.’⁴

‘Generally I will shop at a health food shop near work, also I use the Italian Deli on Trafalgar Road, and I also use the health food shop at the standard... I use the organic vegetables from Greenwich market, I use the co op on Trafalgar Road for stuff that I can’t get elsewhere. That’s pretty much that.’⁵

The positive experience of shopping in smaller, more personal locations are often reinforced by a dislike and distrust for the larger multi national chain supermarkets.

‘I would avoid shopping at Tesco...because... applying the general small is beautiful philosophy...and the perception of the distorting effects that Tesco has on politics and the economy and the community as well.’⁶

‘I guess we felt anti the big companies but couldn’t really complain about it and then put your money there every week. Even though us not shopping there doesn’t make any difference at all. I think we feel comfortable to support a shop like ‘Better Food’.’⁷

Some narratives also feature the desire to support small businesses.

‘I think it’s important to buy food from places like farmers markets and organic farmers; because it gives them work and keeps their business going.’⁸

It is often the whole package of shopping in alternative environments including as mentioned the personal contact, the trust for food in terms of quality and production, as well as the aesthetic experience, which leads ‘alternatively orientated’ regular consumers to articulate an enhanced shopping experience. Supermarkets are spoken about with genuine negative emotion by some ‘alternatively orientated’ regular organic consumers.

³ Regular Organic Consumer I

⁴ Regular Organic Consumer B

⁵ Regular Organic Consumer E

⁶ Regular Organic Consumer B(2)

⁷ Regular Organic Consumer B

⁸ Regular Organic Consumer I (2)

'I hate the experience. I hate it, I find them really horrible, they're too big. I don't like really big shops because I think they're really unpleasant to be in. I don't like the lighting, I hate bright lighting. It's horrible.'⁹

There is a nuance amongst these consumers that the realm of the supermarket is in-authentic as a location for sourcing organic food.

Although the necessities of everyday life drive even the 'alternatively orientated' regular organic consumers to use supermarkets on occasions, a common distrust for supermarkets is evident. This suspicion can be seen as an element of an anti commercial attitude, in opposition to multinational power and a rejection of the money-making values that big companies stand for. Along with consumer's anti commercial attitude comes a rejection of conventional branding, excessive packaging, aggressive marketing and advertising. Some consumers show an explicit desire and willingness to exercise some power to avoid playing a role in this alienating supermarket context.

The second subset of regular consumers, in contrast, articulate a practical preference for shopping at supermarkets and are unlikely to articulate a preference for any ideal associated with smaller, specialist shopping locations for sourcing organic food.

'I like Sainsbury's. The selection is better and if I do decide to make a really nice meal and I'm treating Angela then I know I won't find all the ingredients I want in Asda and I also think there is a more extensive selection in Sainsbury's and I think also it caters for a particular type of clientele. You can find vine leaves there; Dolmades and Sushi.'¹⁰

'It is between Waitrose, Marks and Spencer's and Sainsbury's. It was always Waitrose, then when Phil moved in we started going to Sainsbury's as well because he likes the branded products that he can get in Sainsbury's'¹¹

'I've never been let down by them, I've never felt dissatisfied with Sainsbury's, I've grown up around Sainsbury's... from a child I've known Sainsbury's through to leaving my last town of residence, Didcot, and then moving here we're lucky enough to having a big Sainsbury's on our doorstep.'¹²

'There's a Tesco's Express at the end of our road, great, there's a cash point, and they do organic milk, Soya milk and organic bread. They are good, cheap, convenient...you know if you make the most of the Tesco's offers you can cut down your shopping bill quite significantly in big packets of things that for us is great...'¹³

The distinguishing characteristic about this second subset of consumers in contrast to the first is that they appear to have accepted and in some cases embraced the supermarket as a necessary shopping location. Narratives from this subset neither strongly feature negative reflections about supermarkets or express desire to shop in alternative contexts. There is also a tendency for these regular consumers to view shopping as a practical chore rather than a leisurely pursuit.

'I am a lazy shopper in Asda I would want to get it over and done with.'¹⁴

Trust

⁹ Regular Organic Consumer H

¹⁰ Regular Organic Consumer G (2)

¹¹ Regular Organic Consumer F

¹² Regular Organic Consumer F (2)

¹³ Regular Organic Consumer A

¹⁴ Regular Organic Consumer G (2)

We have found that for most of the regular organic consumers in our sample there is an implication that trust is one of the most important concerns when shopping for food. For some consumers, it is trust in a food retailer that provides the desired reassurance. Clearly, the experience of trust will be achieved in different ways by consumers who shop in different locations. The ‘supermarket orientated’ consumers experience trust within the reliable, predictable context of a supermarket, where most goods will be mass produced.

‘I trust Waitrose and Marks and Spencer’s. Not too sure about Sainsbury’s, just not too sure.’¹⁵

Lack of trust for certain supermarkets is also sometimes related to negative media stories.

‘I know that Tesco bought some beef, they bought the animal babies and they fed them with normal (not organic food) food and they had all the vaccinations and everything, and then at some point of their life they bought the animal and fed them for 6 months with organic food and then killed the animal and said this animal is organic... I don’t trust them anymore. But I never trusted them anyway.’¹⁶

Even though this example actually conforms to organic standards, there are imagined values and expectations about what organic food is or should be which do not tally with this reality. The implication is that organic food from the supermarket context cannot easily be trusted in the same way that organic food from a smaller producer can. There are dichotomised ideas about organic food and their associated ethic value, from small scale idyllic producers in juxtaposition to mainstream, corporate producers.

Trust features as a major value in stories about shopping in locations where there is direct contact with a producer or cooperative.

‘Abel and Cole have been very good because they send a lot of information about the company how they operate...because they are basically a cooperative as well...and actually have been doing it for probably six or seven years...’¹⁷

Trust is partly about the food safety, quality and the ethics of a company; important reasons underpinning decisions to buy organic food. For ‘alternatively orientated’ regular consumers, trust is tied up with ethical concerns and traceability. Relevant information, at an informal level, is often perceived as being easier to access within the context of a smaller shop than a large supermarket chain.

‘I don’t know if ethical is the right word, but in terms of Colin he is horrified by supermarkets because of the fact that products have come from all over the world and are air freighted, not knowing where meat comes from and not .. I suppose not trusting them anymore.’¹⁸

In the cases when ‘alternatively orientated’ regular consumers are faced with the necessity of having to shop within a supermarket, the choice is often mindful of which supermarket is most trusted.

‘I have a coop round the corner and I get things there when I need it but I know they are Gm free and they are more ethical than a lot of other supermarkets. I try and go to the organic range anyway.’¹⁹

¹⁵ Regular Organic Consumer F

¹⁶ Regular Organic Consumer C

¹⁷ Regular Organic Consumer D

¹⁸ Regular Organic Consumer E

¹⁹ Regular Organic Consumer I

Issues of trust and distrust are related to some extent to consumers differing attitudes towards shopping locations. As we would expect the subset of regular organic ‘alternatively orientated’ consumers distinctively experience a lack of trust for large supermarkets because they do not trust that such large companies will operate in a way where people and planet matter above the motive for making profit and the experience is anonymous, there is little opportunity to ask important questions about food. Therefore smaller shopping locations where direct contact with a producer or supplier can be obtained are favoured because there is more opportunity to retrieve information. In contrast, some consumers from the ‘supermarket orientated’ subset tend to articulate trust for their supermarkets of choice and they often relate this to direct experiences of reliability, consistency of produce and the favourable branding of the company. This branding may feature messages about the company’s ethics and food sourcing policies.

For other ‘supermarket orientated’ regular consumers trust for organic food features in narratives as a value that comes with the organic product irrespective of shopping location.

‘I blindly trust that [organic food] is better for you and nicer without the chemicals of conventional produce’²⁰

Price

Most regular consumers of organic food in our sample say they will consciously pay more money for food to experience the trust and gain the reassurance they seek. However, most will not pay more without thinking about what they are getting for their money.

A narrative from one ‘alternatively orientated’ regular organic consumer articulates awareness that spending excessive money on food may be perceived as an extravagance. This is often justified because money is saved in other areas for example by no longer going on holiday or no longer buying unhealthy snack foods or by not going to the pub and drinking alcohol. There is a deliberate attempt to point out that organic food choices aren’t practiced with purity nor to be pretentious. This consumer communicates that they select organic items they believe deserve paying a premium for while excluding those they deem unworthy of a premium. It has been rationalised as part of a reasoning process and in most cases it is deemed worth paying more. This self-conscious attempt to avoid being seen as a conspicuous consumer swayed by popular advertising can be seen as reinforcing a concept of alternative values where the practice of shopping is evaluated and carried out with awareness. Such reflection and justification for spending indicates that substantial thought is put into weighing up financial considerations for buying organic food. Gardner argues that people go through a process of assessment which involves the development of arguments in favour of a decision. Such reasoning about price can be seen as part of this cognitive process convincing the person they are making a favourable decision.

Other ‘alternatively orientated’ regular consumers in this study also select organic products that they deem worth paying the premium for and are often acutely aware about the price of certain organic foods and price is central to determining whether a product is purchased.

‘I think it is really expensive. I mean I have picked up organic strawberries and seen they cost four pounds and put them back. I really can’t afford that.’²¹

²⁰ Regular Organic Consumer G(2)

²¹ Regular Organic Consumer I

Most of the ‘supermarket orientated’ regular consumers in the sample accept paying the price premium for organic food and price is not an obvious issue. One exceptional case of a ‘supermarket orientated’ regular consumer who articulates price as a significant factor in decisions about food shopping and chooses to shop in the supermarket context specifically to achieve low prices and best value for money. This consumer has a large family, four children under 10 years old, supported solely by one full time income and most significantly has experienced cancer which has brought about a hyper awareness of certain potentially high risk foods. Organic food habits are therefore adopted specifically for the high risk foods.

On the whole premium prices for organic produce do not challenge a regular consumer’s beliefs about organic food.

Dedicated organic consumers in particular have established a rationale in support of the cost of their organic food habits which relates to notions about the hidden and artificial costs of conventional production.

‘If you look at say the cost of meat, in real values, meat is cheaper now than it was 15 years ago. We are paying for it through our taxes and the environmental damage not through the price for the food. So I factor in that we are not paying more for organic food, we are actually paying the right price for organic food; we are not paying the costs in other ways. At the moment, because we are dual income and have no kids, money isn’t a worry.’²²

Some dedicated regular consumer’s comment that they do not consciously look at prices because other factors, such as trust, override price. In such cases income levels are relatively high (i.e. two full time working professionals in a household with no dependents) and the food budget is not restricted.

‘I would never, in terms of my shopping bill, make a decision based on cost. I am not frivolous in terms of spending, but in terms of my food I would rather shop in a shop that I trust and pay more ...’²³

Occasional consumers of organic food

Shopping Locations

Occasional organic consumers in this study vary in their shopping locations and again it is possible to identify two distinct subsets, ‘alternatively orientated’ and ‘supermarket orientated’ consumers.

Occasional organic ‘alternatively orientated’ consumers are similar to the same subset of regular organic consumers in that they also prefer to avoid busy anonymous supermarkets and will spend time sourcing ingredients from a variety of specialist locations. Again there is a value placed on the shopping experience.

‘That’s what I do like about places like Fresh and Wild, most of them do have an interest and knowledge of the products they stock and they are happy to talk about it for me that makes a better shopping experience socially, generally as they know and care about the food.’²⁴

²² Regular Organic Consumer E

²³ Regular Organic Consumer F

²⁴ Occasional Organic Consumer E

'I try and support small shops... I realise we do have a choice. I'm lucky I live in the middle of a city in an ok area and there are ethnic minorities living here, a Chinese shop and an Albanian shop and I have got relatively easy access to a variety of foods so I don't have to make an effort really. On my way home from work I pass different shops. No hassle...very convenient.'²⁵

'Supermarket orientated' occasional organic consumers in our sample, especially those with busy family lives, tend to shop for the majority of their food in supermarkets. These are often convenient locations in close proximity to their home or the choice of where to shop is restricted because of where they live. The occasional organic consumers in this study are well educated and socially- and environmentally conscious people. Some 'Supermarket orientated' occasional consumers will however opt to buy their organic food items from certain alternative suppliers such as farmers markets (for example eggs, milk or meat).

'So if I need or I want to buy some meat there are some suppliers that I know who come to the slow food market and sometimes to the farmers market, who I know will be there and will bring some really nice beef. It's tasty, it's good, it's expensive-ish at least in comparison to Sainsbury but we know it's nice and good.'²⁶

The narrative suggests that motivation for consuming occasional organic food products from outlets close to the source of production are chosen for reasons relating to quality and taste. The aspect of 'localness' is also articulated as an additional reason to consume from such locations.

Trust

The occasional organic consumers in our sample like the regular consumers are motivated to make shopping decisions based on trust. Again the trust in the producer features as an important factor in the shopping decision. One way trust is experienced is from feeling reassured that the product has been bought direct from the source of production. Direct food purchases may not specifically be organic, they may be locally produced or free range, but the same value for experiencing direct contact with a producer applies. This is a common value for occasional organic consumers who are 'alternatively orientated' in terms of their shopping locations.

'Yes I think it gives you a sense of security. If you talk to the producer I think it makes you feel they can't lie to you about the food. It might not be true but I feel I know what I'm getting. It's more enjoyable to do shopping like that. That why I don't like going to the supermarkets. I find them very impersonal. They're slightly stressful and a bit depressing really.'²⁷

What distinguishes most occasional organic consumers from regular organic consumers is an articulation that they are not active in sourcing food specifically because it is organic. There is a degree of scepticism about organic products and the organic label conveyed by many of the occasional consumers. This scepticism can be linked to a desire to explicitly resist being a conspicuous consumer who is keeping up with the Joneses, and it can be interpreted as a way of a refusing to be hoodwinked and ripped off by a commercial enterprising industry that is little understood, let alone trusted.

²⁵ Occasional Organic Consumer D

²⁶ Occasional Organic Consumer A

²⁷ Occasional Organic Consumer D

'I remember when people were first talking about organic, it was on the news, I remember my parents talking about it and Liz's mum who is very big on her organic products talking about it. It's good for you it's healthy it's organic you've got to have it kind of thing.'²⁸

The majority of occasional consumers see the organic label as tainted by too much profiteering which is seen as somehow out of line with their consumer expectations about the ideal counter-culture aims and objectives of the organic movement. For example the realisation that organic processed food may be just as unhealthy as conventional processed food appears to be in opposition to expected and imagined values associated with what organic food should be.

'I know people will buy organic because they just think it is better because it is organic and it has an organic label. I don't think I buy that one as it were. When you start looking at the labels and you have a Sainsbury marketer who has marketed something as organic and actually you look at the back of the packet and it's stuffed full of things that aren't good for you, they are pulling the wool over your eyes and you think hey this is organic it has to be good for you, well it's not.'²⁹

This insight that organic food products do not conform to expected ideals rouses suspicion about the whole organic industry and the image of organic food becomes more associated with capitalist business.

In some instances the main concern articulated by occasional consumers, in resistance to mainstream food culture, is buying locally produced food. As discussed, local food sourced direct from a producer, offers consumers a sense of traceability and trust as well as optimism for in their ability to practice sustainable consumption. Such food may happen to be organic as well as local.

Additionally, occasional consumers may buy free range products which also happen to be organic or food-allergy-friendly products which are wheat free and dairy free and are again organic. Organic food may be bought by default in these cases.

Price

Price features in the narratives of occasional consumers of organic food as an important consideration for making food choices. While regular consumers explicitly convey their acceptance of the fact that organic produce costs more, occasional consumers are less convinced about price discrepancies for organic goods and this is more likely to be a stumbling block which deters occasional consumers from wider organic consumption.

Most occasional consumers articulate their perception that organic food is expensive, and often they are influenced by non organic lower prices and special offers or bargains.

'For me it's more important that it's free range. Organic can be quite expensive. I'd like it to be free range so I know the animals have been properly treated before they go for the chop. Ideally it would be organic and free range but there is a price consideration. Organic meat can sometimes be a bit of a problem because it's quite expensive.'³⁰

'Well if you pay twice as much for tomatoes that are organic... well I wouldn't do it because I'm not 100% convinced that it makes that much difference or that those tomatoes are totally organic. If you are going to spend twice as much on something then it puts you off buying it.'³¹

²⁸ Occasional Organic Consumer E

²⁹ Occasional Organic Consumer A

³⁰ Occasional Organic Consumer D

³¹ Occasional Organic Consumer F

‘Two for the price of one things like that certainly... non organic stuff that’s on two for one that’s more of an influence really.’³²

‘I go to Lidl mainly for fruit and vegetables because they are cheap and I’ve not had any issues with quality and dark chocolate and fruit juices are quite good and yoghurt. Otherwise I buy fruit and veg from a grocery shop... there’s a guy calling out the bargains, and I have a favourite which is good value and I like the variety.’³³

There is recognition amongst occasional consumers that for some organic products it is worth paying more, in particular for eggs and dairy products. This is generally related to quality and safety concerns.

‘One of the things is the price differential is not so great first of all...and the quality and the taste of the milk I find is something which appeals to me really specifically with the milk’³⁴

The reluctance to systematically buy more organic products, relates to issues of price, availability as well as a scepticism that some occasional organic consumers’ have for organic production, labelling and marketing.

‘I am not always convinced that what is sold as organic is necessarily as pure as I would like it to be and the difference between that and non organic food is not substantial’³⁵

Non-Organic Consumers

The narratives of non organic consumers in this study indicate that their shopping habits do not represent a lack of interest in or engagement with issues surrounding food but a lack of financial resources and incentives to make organic food purchases. The shopping habits of non organic consumers are as rich and diverse as those of the consumers from the other two groups.

‘I think [with] food and lots of things in life that you need to keep learning, and part of that is always try new things and eat new foods, approach food in new ways.’³⁶

In this study cost is the most important factor when food shopping for this group of consumers. There appears to be an incentive to spend less money on food. This may not be because the non organic consumer’s income level is lower than those of regular and occasional organic consumers but the food budget is lower due to different priorities, different values and a perceived lack of evidence and lack of trust that organic food is worth paying more for.

Shopping locations

Unlike with regular and occasional consumers, non organic consumers in this study do not consist of subsets of ‘alternatively orientated’ and ‘supermarket orientated’ consumers. All non consumers in this sample shop mainly in supermarkets as well as in other smaller locations.

³² Occasional Organic Consumer B

³³ Occasional Organic Consumer E

³⁴ Occasional Organic Consumer F

³⁵ Occasional Organic Consumer F

³⁶ Non Organic Consumer B

Large supermarkets tend to be visited routinely, while small groceries are visited on an ad hoc basis.

‘if I go past an interesting looking delicatessen and I need to get something like sun dried tomatoes or maybe some kind of ham or some olives or something I will maybe stop off there, or a Thai supermarket I get things like lemongrass or coconut block you know, south Asian kind of shops I would get more specialist ingredients.’³⁷

Narratives indicate that shopping locations are often chosen for reasons directed related to convenience and cost benefits as well as due to established historical habits and to access specific specialist ingredients.

However, all non organic consumers’ narratives, in line with the ‘alternatively orientated’ regular and occasional consumers, feature criticisms of the anonymous supermarket location. While they articulate that they shop in these locations for convenience and cost benefits, they also suggest they prefer the experience of shopping in small farm shops or groceries.

‘You know, I would be quite happy to go back to shopping in small shops, there’s something nice about going shopping then, whizzing around a supermarket isn’t a pleasure it is something you have to do. It’s all about speed and getting it done and rushing on to the next thing. But popping down to the shops is nice.’³⁸

However, the constraints of contemporary life pose a barrier to this ideal scenario of shopping and non consumers in practice do not tend to persevere against the grain to practice this kind of shopping.

Trust

The non organic consumers’ attitudes with regard to notions of trust in food are similar to the attitudes of occasional consumers. Non consumers differ from regular organic consumers who articulate trust through beliefs about the superior safety and quality of organic food as compared to conventional produce. The non organic consumers in this sample in contrast express a lack of trust for organic food items on the premise that they do not have substantive knowledge and convincing evidence about the benefits of organic food. They have a general mistrust for companies and supermarkets that produce and market organic products for profiteering purposes.

‘I don’t understand the basic economics of it...I think that someone is making money from it especially now that the big supermarket are so heavily involved...I really don’t want to buy into that...’³⁹

Price

Whether it is shopping sporadically and spontaneously to buy when the best value deal presents itself, or deliberately sourcing the best value after many years of assessing the shopping arena, the bottom line when shopping, for the non organic consumers in this sample, is value for money.

‘But obviously its time and money are the two central factors in governing my shopping habits I would say’⁴⁰

³⁷ Non Organic Consumer A

³⁸ Non Organic Consumer B

³⁹ Non Organic Consumer C

⁴⁰ Non Organic Consumer A

Organic food is described as an expensive luxury; premium priced pretentious products not for everyday consumption. By rejecting organic food as a branded fashionable fad non organic consumers are reinforcing a notion that they are not swayed by marketing trends, have firm values. Principles of organic farming are seen as highly favourable but the practice is not fully understood and is not trusted to warrant the higher cost which is seen as unjustifiable and unaffordable.

Cooking

Cooking and food preparation habits vary in practice across organic consumer groups, household sizes and lifecycle phases. However, stories about cooking reveal that for all consumers in the sample there is a common aim for home made, tasty, food.

‘Yeah I really enjoy cooking, just cooking at home and I think if you cook you enjoy your food more’⁴¹

In many households cooking is an activity that is enjoyed most at the weekends when time is less of a constraint, and some household members tell stories about the ritual of having a Sunday Roast.

‘Weekends we would probably cook a meal on Saturday and meal on Sunday at home. Then every other weekend Phil’s children come to stay and we do a roast dinner on a Sunday. That’s our little ritual.’⁴²

Those with children are less likely to speak about enjoying cooking and are more likely to be considering the eating needs of family members rather than their own enjoyment for the activity of cooking.

‘It is boring and I would like to try something else but sometimes I just don’t have the energy to make that leap and try to do something new and different. Plus we have four people in the family, they all have different tastes and its pretty frustrating sometimes to try and...’⁴³

What appears is that enjoyment is enhanced at a later life cycle phase when cooking can be for leisure when there are fewer daily demands of young family life.

‘I do enjoy cooking especially now because I only cook if I want to. I mean I used to cook you know, when my kids were younger I used to cook every day and it was a chore, often it did feel like a chore.’⁴⁴

There are a small proportion of consumers from the regular and occasional organic groups who enthuse about the activity of cooking, while all the non consumers do, generally devoting time to thinking about recipes and experimenting with food. Stories give details about favourite recipes; others mention more elaborate recipes tried out for the first time more recently. Those with a high degree of passion for quality of life issues, family values as well as those committed to being responsible citizen consumers, are also likely to place value on cooking and mealtimes as being a positive and important aspect of family life.

⁴¹ Regular Organic Consumer I

⁴² Regular Organic Consumer F

⁴³ Regular Organic Consumer F

⁴⁴ Regular Organic Consumer H

'I'm a big we-sit-down-together-for-food-if-we-possibly- can person.' ⁴⁵

Single consumers in our sample articulate the communal aspect of meals as important.

'You cook a meal for a few people and it tastes good that feels good and vice versa. If somebody cooks you a meal... it's like more collective... sharing of the process of consumption' ⁴⁶

There is a suggestion that eating home-cooked food is a privilege, and symbolises an emotional sense that all is well in life. Home cooked food, eaten communally is in contrast to the individualistic and alienating modern convenience food from a jar or tin and often eaten in isolation.

In rejection of ready meals and processed food, cooking is also seen as a favourable activity because it allows a level of control for what goes into a meal.

'I like cooking and because I like to know what has gone into it and I enjoy the process of cooking and it tastes nicer and you can adjust it to what you like rather than what comes out of the jar or packet.' ⁴⁷

There is no evidence to suggest that regular organic consumers are more likely to cook than those in the other two consumer groups. Nor is there evidence that there is more emphasis on cooking healthy food from regular consumers in comparison to the two other groups. When regular consumers spoke about cooking and ingredients they generally did not mention organic food.

However, the concept non consumers have about what constitutes a healthy meal differs from the concept that most regular consumers have and to some extent that of occasional consumers. Non organic consumers do not appear overly aware about healthy eating practices and tend to make sweeping generalisations that anything that is home cooked is healthy, irrespective of the ingredients used and how they are prepared. Therefore, non consumers are not explicitly health conscious and in difference with regular consumers do not possess explicit aspirations to eat a 'healthy' diet.

Mealtimes and eating habits

Meal times play an important role in everyday life across all the consumer groups and life cycle phases in our sample. There are differences between single people and families in the practice and negotiation of meal times due to different patterns of sharing and eating dynamics, but there is an overall consensus that meals are an important aspect of every day life. The families in our sample tend to place more emphasis on the planning of meals and have established traditions of communal eating such as the family orientated event of the Sunday Roast or Christmas dinner which is often cooked by the husband (as a one off significant gesture). Communal eating is very much a recreational pursuit and appreciated as a quality aspect of family life. The single people in our sample who either live alone or in shared households clearly still value the experience of eating communally and speak more about eating out or cooking for friends than families do.

⁴⁵ Regular Organic Consumer E

⁴⁶ Non Organic Consumer A

⁴⁷ Non Organic Consumer B

Across all three consumer groups narratives suggest that consumers make a distinction between traditional food and contemporary food often inspired by other national cuisines. This indicates that food habits have changed because of cultural influences due to migration, advertising, a broader range of ingredients available, and popular media influences such as cookery programmes. The traditional form of a meal in the UK is one that consists of meat, potatoes and vegetables – most commonly referred to ‘as meat and two veg’. The transition from traditional to contemporary food has been examined in further detail in section ‘2.3: Changes in food habits’.

Regular Organic Consumers

Regular organic food consumers are a varied group and their notions about what constitutes a meal differ from case to case. Some express enthusiasm for good, simple, wholesome food (in line with more traditional British meals), while others tell stories about more complex (time consuming) meals they cook involving spices, such as Mexican chilli or Indian curry. All regular consumers’ narratives suggest a value for meals that are healthy and home-cooked and most households sit down communally for a meal every day. One common feature in the meals of regular consumers is the constituent of fresh vegetables and fruit.

‘Good vegetables, I suppose, and fruit form a major part of it.’⁴⁸

‘Yeah quite balanced, always vegetables... I have had breast cancer so I have become very hyper-aware of what’s healthy and what isn’t, and I try as much as possible to make sure everyone in the family eats lots of fruit and veg...’⁴⁹

For most regular consumers’ in our sample this vegetable/fruit component in a meal/diet is directly related to the associated health benefits. Some even admit that enjoyment is not always a feature and eating fruit is practiced in order to be healthy.

‘Fruit, probably, I see fruit as a very important bit, but I’m the worse in the house at eating fruit. I’ll buy a bowl full I’ll eat it once or twice a week, while the others will eat two pieces of fruits every day they take two pieces with them to work. So while I see it I don’t always practice it.’⁵⁰

In terms of traditional food there is a subset of regular consumers who adhere to the traditional conventions of the past, cooking food in line with the meat and two veg concept of a meal.

‘Yes my son has a cooked meal every evening. I try and have at least two veg and potatoes and some organic meat.’⁵¹

‘We basically steam our veggies, do a carbohydrate and a protein and we put it in the oven or like we fry it in olive oil, that’s it. Its not fussy it’s really simple.’⁵²

Other regular organic consumers are clear to point out in their narratives that they have left the traditional food of their parent’s generation behind and cook food that is a lot more adventurous, often influenced by recipes and ingredients from other nationalities.

⁴⁸ Regular Organic Consumer D

⁴⁹ Regular Organic Consumer A

⁵⁰ Regular Organic Consumer D

⁵¹ Regular Organic Consumer I

⁵² Regular Organic Consumer F

'It's a bit bad really I haven't carried on the family tradition because a lot of her recipes involved meat. I guess what I tend to do is use recipe books to get ideas.'⁵³

'I suppose I was brought up on traditional, you know meat and two veg type food...now I mean generally I really like Indian food / I love Indian food in fact... so I suppose a good meal for me would be, one of my favourite meals which I eat quite a lot of Dahl and rice'⁵⁴

Occasional organic consumers

Within the sample of occasional consumers for this study most adhere to the traditional British concept of a meal while some deviate away from the traditional meal of meat and two veg. Some narratives suggest a strong affiliation with and strict practice of the traditional concept of a meal. Other narratives are rich in the flavours of a plethora of different cuisines and ingredients. Consumers from this group share the concept of mealtimes as representing the value of eating communally and sharing the enjoyment of a meal.

'I think I've been quite lucky because I've seen food bringing people together from an early age and I've picked that up myself and I do like to have people around and bring people together for it, even if the food I cook isn't anything special you know...'⁵⁵

'A meal has to be tasty too. It has to be fun, it has to be a whole event and sit down and eat it together and enjoy it.'⁵⁶

Most occasional consumers in our sample cook food which adheres to the traditional British concept of a meal.

'We would have a typical kind of meat and two veg dinner because I am at home I cook something like that every night.'⁵⁷

The occasional organic consumers who cook more experimentally, describe cooking food influenced by cuisines and flavours from other nations, such as North African, Italian, Greek and Indian.

In similarity with regular organic consumers, occasional consumers show concern for eating balanced, healthy meals and a consciousness to consume fresh fruit and vegetables.

'...and a vegetable constituent... I like to have a large portion of vegetables.'⁵⁸

'In terms of balance it is really important the kids know about fresh fruit and vegetables.'⁵⁹

⁵³ Regular Organic Consumer G

⁵⁴ Regular Organic Consumer H

⁵⁵ Occasional Organic Consumer E

⁵⁶ Occasional Organic Consumer A

⁵⁷ Occasional Organic Consumer C

⁵⁸ Occasional Organic Consumer D

⁵⁹ Occasional Organic Consumer A

Importance in terms of ingredients is placed on quality and freshness and for many in our sample of occasional organic consumers, the localness and seasonality of produce is also cited as an important aspiration.

'I would like to see a return to local food. It's not necessary to have pineapples all year round and certainly it's not necessary to have strawberries in January. I want more seasonal food and local food.'⁶⁰

Non Organic Consumers

This group of consumers have a common approach to and concept of what constitutes a meal. While not all of the non organic consumers in our sample will sit down for a communal meal every night, what the group has in common is a value for home cooked meals. As with the regular and occasional organic consumers in this study, this group of consumers also articulate some preference for fresh unprocessed food and the importance of their diet including fresh fruit and vegetables. However, as already suggested, they tend to express less concern for healthy eating than the other two groups.

'[A meal is] something that has got some fresh ingredients in it... fresh vegetables and herbs and spices...yeah simple in a way... something that is not particularly processed.'⁶¹

'[Good Food is] food that is fresh. Good quality meat, there is a huge difference between different places that you buy meat. I prefer to pay more and get a better cut of meat than have craggily old joints that you pay half the price for. I like fresh fruit and vegetables because I've been brought up with fresh fruit and vegetables.'⁶²

'I think good food is food which has had minimal processes...and has been cooked using the freshest ingredients...'⁶³

Our sample of non organic consumers talk about the preference for seasonal produce and aspire to shop seasonally although admit this is sometimes difficult and not what they always manage to practice.

'I will not buy apples that grow in a different country when we have the best apple season in this country and the most delicious russet apples... it's the same with asparagus and cherries...and strawberries I will only buy in June.'⁶⁴

'I buy from the local green grocers because it's nearly all locally grown and I think they grow a lot of it themselves. We do buy things that are in season, I wouldn't buy strawberries in the winter for instance. I always buy English strawberries and English anything really that is a big. I usually go for locally grown but I do buy New Zealand Braeburn apples and bananas we buy.'⁶⁵

The meals prepared and eaten by the non organic consumers in this sample range from traditional, typical English food such as roast beef with Yorkshire pudding and the English cooked breakfast, to salt cod from Jamaica, and a range of recipes from Iran, Mexico and India

⁶⁰ Occasional Organic Consumer A

⁶¹ Non Organic Consumer A

⁶² Non Organic Consumer B

⁶³ Non Organic Consumer C

⁶⁴ Non Organic Consumer A

⁶⁵ Non Organic Consumer B

as well as Italian pasta dishes. Influences for cooking new recipes are often related to reference group influence.

'I suppose like ...making some kind of Jamaican salt fish, kalalu dish was directly linked to me going round to a friends house who cooked that, because that was something that they had grown up with as a tradition in their family; or going round to a friends house for Iranian new year and having particular dishes and really liking this one dish and then asking how they made it... the process of making that dish impacts upon shopping habits because you are going to start buying ingredients for that which you wouldn't necessarily have bought had you not known about that particular dish.'⁶⁶

All principal shoppers in this group experiment with food from different nations as well as cooking more traditional British food. Narratives do not always feature direct influence from friends but often influence comes from public trends, advertising and promotion in supermarkets and television. There is a clear change in what constitutes a meal for this generation of consumers in comparison to their parents.

'There is still a huge difference between what my parents have and what we have here. We have homemade pizzas and curries and we eat a lot of pasta. My parents don't eat a lot of pasta, they don't eat a lot of rice either, plain white boiled rice they may eat, they have rice pudding but not much as a savoury. My children tend to have curries with rice and popadoms and things that my parents wouldn't recognise if they saw it.'⁶⁷

Lunch time food habits

Interestingly across all consumer groups the food habits of our household members are different at lunch time than when they are at home. This is a time when most consumers will eat out, either at a work canteen or a café close to their workplace. A small proportion of consumers from each group prepare lunch to take to work with them or return home to eat, and in some cases this is certainly motivated by saving money. In other cases this is motivated by wanting to eat home cooked food at lunch time as well. What is striking about most narrative accounts about lunch time is the suspension of food rules during this meal. It is only the very dedicated organic consumers who actually make an effort to source a healthy, organic lunch. The majority of consumers know very little about the origin of the food they are consuming during this meal. This does not pose a problem and is accepted as a normal aspect of working life.

A non organic consumer makes a strong point about the poor quality and experience of lunchtime in Britain, acknowledging the suspension of food rules during this meal.

'I forget to talk about what I eat when I am at work...its disgraceful...I have a really bad diet at work...I don't think I'm the only one...I think we have a disgusting attitude to lunch in this country...I think the amount of time we give ourselves for lunch means we buy convenience food, packaged sandwiches and shove it down our throats and get in with our jobs and it's really unhealthy ...'⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Non Organic Consumer A

⁶⁷ Non Organic Consumer B

⁶⁸ Non Organic Consumer C

2.2 The Encounter with Organic Foods

The first encounter with organic food is something that many consumers find difficult to recall with clarity across all consumer groups. Exceptionally, two regular organic consumers recall the trigger for when they first adopted organic food habits. The first recalls a farm visit which had a significant and lasting impression.

'I think it was during Organic Food Week which the Soil Association runs in September time. We went on an organic farm tour where basically one of the box scheme providers took us round organic farms. About ten people went on it, very interesting, and they gave us a free trial on the organic box scheme as well, to see the conditions.'⁶⁹

The second regular organic food consumer that recalls beginning to purchase organic food is of Canadian origin, the first encounter with organic food came when looking for a specific, popular Canadian product (Peanut Butter). The best quality product in the UK which most closely resembled the authentic Canadian variety just happened to be organic. In this instance the story is one of searching for a familiar taste where there is an emotional link with notions about home and the comfort that brings. It is through this process and the discovery of an organic product, providing this nostalgic link with home, which subsequently leads the household to becoming regular organic consumers for other food items in the future too.

Most other regular consumers in our sample tend not to remember the exact moment when organic consumption commenced, as it occurred many years ago and there were no stories about relatively recent first encounters with organic food. Stories about first encounters with organic food tend to relate either to major events that brought about the change and details about the likely products that would have been purchased. For some it was changes in lifecycle phase (such as securing a well paid job), that meant organic products became more affordable, or the experience of serious illness which brought about the flowering of a renewed interest in food and health.

One occasional consumer's story about early memories about organic food which took place about ten years ago is a story of disappointment. The expectation that organic eggs would come from chickens that were wandering around and would therefore taste better is proved wrong and the realisation is that 'organic eggs don't taste fantastic'⁷⁰.

Generally the narratives of regular consumers in our sample suggest that the first motivation to consciously try organic food occurs because concepts about organic production are understood to include personal benefits in terms of health, quality, safety and taste.

The absence of strong memories about the first encounter with organic food is itself an important insight. This absence of recall fits in with the reality of the time dimension; organic food has been around for a long time and the adoption of habits have blended in with everyday habits. This also fits in with the insight that organic food habits are often adopted gradually over a period of time rather than abruptly as a direct response to a tangible identifiable trigger.

⁶⁹ Regular Organic Consumer E

⁷⁰ Occasional Organic Consumer A

2.3 Changes in Food Habits

It is often not until there is a relative degree of settling down that takes place at a later lifecycle phase, either living independently as a young professional, living with a partner, getting married or having children, that food begins to become important and decisions about food play a more relevant role in everyday life.

‘Not really thinking about what I ate until I was 18, then only when I was 22 when I left university and started fending for myself actually thinking about food, making sure you had lots of vegetables’⁷¹

Childhood food

To understand changes in food habits it is insightful to examine the former food habits often found in stories which feature memories of childhood food. Narratives suggest that childhood food clearly plays a significant role in influencing adult food habits, either due to fond memories which encourage adulthood imitation of fresh, tasty, home- ‘cooked from scratch’ meals or unfavourable memories which trigger changes in adulthood, away from a traditional, unhealthy, unadventurous and perhaps old fashioned British convention.

Regular Organic Consumers

‘And we actually avoid feeding [his parents] a lot of the time because we eat more spicy and interesting food, and if we do cook for them we cook them something really quite bland and nothing that’s going to shock his mother too much.’⁷²

Many regular organic consumers recall memories of the traditional food of their childhood and the difference between how their parents cook and how they themselves presently cook.

‘We had our mother at home and she would cook all meals... So we ate quite a lot when I look back very much meat, two veg kind of approach to meals...[food today is] very much away from the two veg and a piece of meat...’⁷³

Although many stories often feature fond memories of good home cooked food, familiar traditional recipes cooked by a parent (generally a mother) and happy stories of family meal times it is unlikely the same kind of food is cooked in adulthood. But where the recipes didn’t survive, the food values for fresh ingredients in rejection of processed food, and willingness to put effort into meals has been passed on. Another element that has also remained is the value associated with having family meals together. A significant change that is apparent for a number of regular consumers (as well as occasional and non organic) is that of the role of the mother within the household has changed. In the past the mother was far less likely to have worked full time allowing more time for activities associated with food.

⁷¹ Regular Organic Consumer F

⁷² Regular Organic Consumer E

⁷³ Regular Organic Consumer E

'My mum actually made homemade food nearly everyday...very sort of traditional kind of stuff... lots of stew and dumplings and spag bol but it was all home cooked and she used to make home made desserts as well which I really loved...it was quite relaxed because she hadn't been to work, she wouldn't be tied to the cooker but she would be able to enjoy cooking...we would always have really nice sort of communal meals in the evening. So I don't know whether it's connected but I really enjoy cooking and even though I work full time, it's worth making nice meals and they sometimes take quite a lot of time.'⁷⁴

Childhood food is generally remembered as 'traditional' and for some regular organic consumers there is a recollection that recipes lacked adventure and health consciousness - before a golden period of discovery for more exciting, healthy cuisine came about during their own early adulthood. Healthy eating is one factor that often prompts the change towards organic purchasing and in turn opens up a fresh appreciation for discovering new foods, recipes and broader food values.

'My parents are not particularly adventurous. Good honest British roasts and home cooked simple home cooking. It's their generation I think. We are more aware of other influences. We are always doing Mexican or Italian or Thai or something.'⁷⁵

'Even if Mum was working, we would cycle home and the food was always prepared. Whether that was sausages and beans, it wasn't particularly healthy food because... My Mum comes from a very traditional cooking school, the kind of meat and two veg school. She had not discovered pasta, she had not discovered pesto...she has now but at the time when we were growing up, no.'⁷⁶

There are a few exceptions to the general perspective that childhood food was unhealthy or unadventurous. These regular organic consumers remember home grown, homemade, healthy food from their childhoods.

'Yeah...I think now that I have my own family we're doing things quite similarly...when you have children you end up mimicking bits that you liked about your own childhood. Yeah so my parents grew vegetables and we've got an allotment across the road. And Charlie grew up in a family that grew their own vegetables we both know how to do it. We're growing celeriac, parsnips and purple sprouting broccoli...'⁷⁷

'She grew all our own veg , all our own fruit; plum trees, damsons, gooseberry hedges, raspberries...she was ahead of her time because there was a lot unhealthy food around she only had whole grains, brown bread, brown rice, no fried food... I had chips once in my childhood. She made all her own soups and made everything, no processed food. I only realise now how unusual that was for that time.'⁷⁸

'We used lots of olive oil and grains, simple with lots of veg and salads... lots of fish soup and bouillabaisse, the local soup...it's very kind of robust in flavour and healthy, and filling. And sardines...'⁷⁹

Additionally, some traditional cooking practices experienced during childhood are recalled as opportunities to learn from and cherish in adulthood.

⁷⁴ Regular Organic Consumer G

⁷⁵ Regular Organic Consumer G

⁷⁶ Regular Organic Consumer E

⁷⁷ Regular Organic Consumer B

⁷⁸ Regular Organic Consumer I

⁷⁹ Regular Organic Consumer C

‘The other thing I suppose is that I still really enjoy making bread that my Mum used to do... and my grandmother. And I sort of learnt so that’s something that has come through from my childhood is making bread.’⁸⁰

Occasional Organic Consumers

Occasional consumer’s recollections of childhood food include a similar nostalgia as found in regular consumers’ accounts. Memories are similar in the kinds of traditional foods that would have been eaten, often in stark contrast to food eaten today. The majority of occasional consumers remember their childhood food to be traditional British dishes which, in the current context, are generally not considered particularly healthy.

‘I do remember enjoying home baked food, Shepherds Pie, Toad in the Hole’⁸¹

‘It was tomato sauce sandwiches, Rice Crispies and spaghetti Bolognese’⁸²

‘I grew up in Northern Ireland, fatty foods and big breakfasts and obviously a lot of potato, a lot of carbohydrate. I wouldn’t eat fruit I lived a lot of my life on mashed potato. You get a cup of tea and you get a plate of cakes. And you get toast... I got tempted by sweet things I had a cup of tea I would have a Kit Kat, so I consumed a lot of chocolate bars.’⁸³

There are two exceptional cases where childhood food is recalled to be healthy with genuine fondness.

‘I think the fact that mum was from Australia had quite an influence on our eating habits as she placed a lot of importance on fresh fruit and vegetables which she has always been used to as a child.’⁸⁴

‘My earliest recollection in terms of food are home cooked meals that I had as a child, home cooking was something very special. One of the nice things about home cooking was that we used to try and eat some of the food that we actually grew in our garden so there would be times of the year where we would have beans and peas or rhubarb or potatoes and these were particularly good.’⁸⁵

Non Organic Consumers

Most non Organic consumers in our sample recall positive memories of traditional food from their childhood with the exception of one consumer whose memories are rather negative featuring bland, unimaginative, overcooked and stodgy food. Most non organic consumers however have colourful memories about the traditional food they would have eaten, in one instance involving home grown vegetables, but which on the whole were not distinctively healthy.

‘My grandfather owned a café and we lived above the café, so I had tomatoes and eggs, fresh bread made daily by my grandfather, sticky buns, doughnuts all from the café so it was all fresh produce. I usually had roast dinners every lunch time. He used to press his own hams and tongues so everything was good natural food.’⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Regular Organic Consumer H

⁸¹ Occasional Organic Consumer E

⁸² Occasional Organic Consumer B

⁸³ Occasional Organic Consumer C

⁸⁴ Occasional Organic Consumer A

⁸⁵ Occasional Organic Consumer F

⁸⁶ Non organic Consumer A

The majority of this group have changed their eating habits quite dramatically in adulthood and the one consumer whose memories are particularly disappointing has completely rejected the kind of food he would have eaten as a child. All non organic consumers have adopted broader, less traditional, more eclectic food habits in adulthood.

School Dinners

All Consumer Groups

Other changes significant in the development of adulthood food habits are the character of former foods experienced outside of the family home, such as school dinners. The memories of school dinners do not really differ between the consumer groups. Memories associated with school dinners tend to be a trigger for extreme feelings and unpleasant sensations which may have played a part in influencing notions about what constitutes good and bad food.

Memories of school dinners rarely feature tasty, healthy food;

‘...it was fish in batter, horrible fatty meat and the vegetables over cooked and disgusting, all watery.’⁸⁷

‘Yeah really ... unhealthy puddings. Semolina and tapioca and all the things that Phil really laughs at like my pet hates...’⁸⁸

Student food habits

All Consumer Groups

The trauma of eating horrible school dinners does not necessarily spur young adults to adopt better food habits during student years, however it appears to be during this life cycle stage that the development of adulthood preferences become reinforced. Generally across consumer groups memories of early adulthood food during student years is characterised by a lack of time for and specific interest in food, with other aspects of social life taking on more importance during this life-cycle phase. However, it is at this stage that some consumers suggest they develop more food awareness, are exposed to more varieties of food and perhaps the foundations are laid for a future orientation towards organic food.

‘I think in terms of what I think of as good food, I didn’t reflect on it that much as a child but I became aware of it within my teens particularly when I became a student.’⁸⁹

The role of food as an important value consideration in everyday life appears to be of less consequence for the young single student, partly due to financial constraints, and the living logistics of shared households as well as the preference for other cultural pursuits. However, food during the latter part of the student phase does feature in many narrative accounts as an activity

⁸⁷ Regular Organic Consumer I

⁸⁸ Regular Organic Consumer F

⁸⁹ Occasional Organic Consumer F

that involved individuals cooking with friends and maintaining a sense of value for home cooked food and the experience of sharing a meal.

‘With a housemate we used to cook a proper meal, she’d cook one day and I’d cook the next. It was generally made from scratch. We’d have meat once a week. Like cottage pie and spaghetti Bolognese. It was cheap and convenient, we’d have curries sometimes. She introduced me to Toad in the Hole.’⁹⁰

Student habits tend not to differ particularly between consumer groups, even those with a strong passion for food and organic sourcing in adulthood recall student food days as driven by convenience and budget.

‘When I went to Manchester my food education was improving in terms of how to make things, but I didn’t really get interested in food properly until I was doing my own independent shopping when I had left university.’⁹¹

‘I used to shop at the local Somerfield it was loads of pasta, curries usual student staples.’⁹²

‘I went to university and as a student you are obviously concerned about spending as little money as possible and I was in halls and the meals weren’t very nice. The last year I was there they got a French chef in and the meals improved dramatically. But I did have salads... I cooked...I did make sure I had vegetables but I don’t think my meals were that healthy... but as a student it’s about eating cheaply isn’t it.’⁹³

Whereas the majority of consumers do not recall any orientation towards organic food during student years there are two consumers (one regular, one occasional) who do suggest that they had already begun thinking about organic food.

‘I guess as a student I was aware of [organic food] but it wasn’t an option. I was really hard up.’⁹⁴

‘I don’t know if I ever made an effort to buy organic because it was organic. I suppose initially as a student the price issues meant I wouldn’t go there. It wasn’t I didn’t want it’⁹⁵

Adulthood food

All Consumer Groups

The most significant changes in food habits occur after student-hood when a more stable and secure life-style is generally adopted. Narratives of regular consumers tend to draw a link between the commencement of adulthood and the security and freedom this brings; it is the beginning of shopping in a more liberated way.

‘When we first moved to Bristol as we were both on very low salaries and we are both the kind of people that like the idea of organic food but couldn’t really justify spending that much money on it. It’s only been the last five years that money hasn’t really been a problem food wise so food wise we buy pretty much what we want.’⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Occasional Organic Consumer D

⁹¹ Regular Organic Consumer F

⁹² Regular Organic Consumer G

⁹³ Regular Organic Consumer I

⁹⁴ Regular Organic Consumer B

⁹⁵ Occasional Organic Consumer E

⁹⁶ Regular Organic Consumer G

In this case the change in resources enables food preferences which may have begun developing during student years to be practiced without restriction. However the student mind set of budgeting is difficult to change as one regular consumer accounts.

‘I think for a while I still had that student mentality where you don’t spend much money on food.’⁹⁷

Resources also relate to elements of availability of and access to organic food and this is often influenced by a particular context which prompts a change.

‘They set up a food coop at work and I did a box scheme and that started it and then I started buying [organic] milk too.’⁹⁸

Sometimes change in food habits occur when adopting a new role such as is experienced by some women when they get married.

‘Getting married so that I had to do the cooking and didn’t rely on my parents and what they were eating.’⁹⁹

The major life event of having children again triggers definite food changes.

‘I think the point when it changed was when we first had children when I had to start feeding other people.’¹⁰⁰

2.4 Influences on changing food habits

The food habits of consumers from all three groups often change because of the influence of a significant person or event.

Health and Illness

Health consciousness has a strong influence on food habits. Narratives include accounts of diets for health purposes:

‘Well I did a vegan detox diet as a way of trying to loose a bit of weight and get energy and I thought it was going to be difficult and I must admit I quite enjoyed it...so the vegan diet expanded what I was buying and eating....’¹⁰¹

Events related to health which trigger change in food habits and a more acute awareness of food include the onset of diet related illnesses, often caused by stress which triggers food allergies and intolerance. In many cases regular consumers of organic food express direct experience with food related illness. Either a partner or a family member has developed symptoms which have brought the whole area of food into question and triggered an often radical change in food habits.

⁹⁷ Regular Organic Consumer B

⁹⁸ Regular Organic Consumer G

⁹⁹ Non organic Consumer B

¹⁰⁰ Occasional Organic Consumer A

¹⁰¹ Occasional Organic Consumer E

‘In my early 20’s, I travelled a lot and developed an ulcer. They said you will have to take this medication for the rest of your life. I was like; I cannot at 25... As a result of that I got into Buddhism, meditation, diet and vegetarianism. Made me think about what I eat.’¹⁰²

This negative experience of stress and its relationship to diet has often triggered a greater interest in food, and concerns for health often lead to the purchasing of organic food products.

Major life events such as diagnosis of a disease such as Breast Cancer can have a profound influence on food habits and in particular the decision to begin eating certain organic food products (in particular dairy products). A concern regarding the relationship between non organic milk and the presence of pesticide residues has been quoted as an example to back up the decision to consume only organic dairy products by one regular organic consumer.

‘I think it’s to do with the enzymes and the high fat content. The Western diet being so high in fat is apparently a big factor in breast cancer. So, if I do use dairy, I’ll buy organic milk and organic butter and very good quality olive oil that is first cold pressed so it doesn’t have any of the nasty chemicals from the processing. I just think that, my gut feeling is that there are more pesticide residues in fat than anything else.’¹⁰³

Pregnancy

Change in food habits are also influenced by pregnancy and the birth of a baby and this often triggers of a new relationship with food, a more refined sense of health consciousness and taking extra care to get a balanced diet.

‘When children come along you suddenly become very aware of everything. You become aware of your health, what you eat and our eldest was breast feed for nearly 14 months and Helen became very conscious of what she was eating’¹⁰⁴

‘When I was 16 I thought “No more, I can’t do it anymore” so I stopped meat completely; and then when I got pregnant I started to eat chicken again...I was craving for chicken I think, the smell of it, the roasting chicken yeah because during the pregnancy I had anaemia’¹⁰⁵

The evidence from narratives suggests that this change in lifecycle brings about a deeper, more conscious consideration for personal health as well as the health of immediate family. There is a relationship between wanting to make the best decisions in relation to health and taking seriously the profound sense of responsibility that comes with being a parent. For some of the regular organic consumers in our sample with children the birth of a new family member influenced considerable change in their organic food habits and strengthened their conviction to buy organic food.

‘But it was half hearted organic shopping. It wasn’t until I had my first daughter that things changed. It was when I became pregnant that we realised we had to start being a bit extra careful what you expose yourself to. I think it was that that pushed us to that next stage.’¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Regular Organic Consumer F

¹⁰³ Regular Organic Consumer A

¹⁰⁴ Regular Organic Consumer A

¹⁰⁵ Regular Organic Consumer C

¹⁰⁶ Regular Organic Consumer B

The occasional and non consumers of organic food in our sample also communicate how having children influences decisions about food. However, the change tends to be a more general change in terms of healthy eating and concern about future food preferences rather than more specific concerns referring to the safety aspects and health benefits of eating organic food.

‘But I think to be perfectly honest it didn’t really kick off until Morgan was born, because once you have a little tiny baby you really do not want to contaminate their body and you try harder.’¹⁰⁷

‘I think the point when it changed was when we first had children. When I had to start feeding other people... we started thinking about our young children and how they develop. That’s when I became interested, as I was the one that was making the decisions and had the responsibility for feeding them.’¹⁰⁸

‘Having children made you more conscious of food. they had what we ate, but liquidised...they had every vegetable you could think of so they were introduced to lots of different flavours as I didn’t want them being fussy and they are not fussy with their food now, so that’s ideal.’¹⁰⁹

Friends and Family

Other influences which have impacted on the food habits of regular consumers of organic food are often driven by personal influences such as friends or family. Close friends, colleagues and family member are recalled in narratives as being strong influencing forces.

‘It was my friend actually, she’s passionate about these things and I got swept along with it.’¹¹⁰

‘I worked at the environment centre in Bath and everyone was talking about [organic food]; the people I was mixing with, and I was strongly influenced.’¹¹¹

The context of professional work where many ideas circulate and knowledge is exchanged is found to have an important influence on consumers’ food habits, especially where a profession relates to subjects around sustainability, nutrition or the environment. Many regular consumers who have an engagement with the issues surrounding organic food have a forum for the discussion of relevant concerns within their context of work, or have a partner who works in a field where such debates take place. This social network may not only be a source of social capital where new avenues for consumption and practice are exchanged but can produce reinforcement about the benefits of organic food.

Interestingly the development of common identifications within social networks can lead to an adoption of like minded opinions and habits about the environment and relating to issues around organic food. For example there is a subset of regular consumers within our sample who speak about growing their own food on allotments. This group are part of a broader social network, where knowledge and ideas about food are exchanged.

¹⁰⁷ Occasional Organic Consumer C

¹⁰⁸ Occasional Organic Consumer A

¹⁰⁹ Non Organic Consumer B

¹¹⁰ Regular Organic Consumer G

¹¹¹ Regular Organic Consumer B

Often influence is indirect and subtle and occurs because there is a feeling of affiliation and identification with a person or group. A culmination of influences over time can lead to the development of organic food habits.

'I guess a mixture partly upbringing, the friends I mix with, reading the paper, watching news and Charlie as well and his job and the things he's interested in and being a mum you care more about what things are.'¹¹²

Influences from friends and family suggesting the health benefits of organic food feature in narratives;

'I remember when people were first talking about organic, it was on the news, I remember my parents talking about it and Liz's mum who is very big on her organic products talking about it. It's good for you it's healthy it's organic you've got to have it kind of thing.'¹¹³

'Most of my influence Fair Trade, organic and vegetarianism and everything like that, very much healthy lifestyle, has come from my sister. I have got two sisters but it's the one that's nearest to me in age, the middle child of the family, she is the teacher; vegetarian all her life and very much into world peace and karma, so yeah she has been a strong influence.'¹¹⁴

Influences often come directly from other family members and often partners will comment that they have been influenced by their spouses. Recent co-habitation brings about a new set of influences and can involve forming shared food habits.

'My mum was at the fore front and she pointed out the soil association was in Bristol and that was in the mid nineties and I started to read about it and get interested.'

'Yeah certainly since I moved in... More when I've moved in...I now form part of the same shopping and purchasing patterns with [name of partner], prior to that I was on my own and still doing what I used to do before...it was all learning for me, it was a learning experience, learning from [name of partner] and I obviously I trust her explicitly and I grew to understand why she wanted to shop in a particular way and for the reasons behind her purchasing decisions and I've come to take that on board'.¹¹⁵

The Role of the Expert as an Influence

Experts are referred to as a source of influence by regular consumers, especially in terms providing insights into matters of health and nutrition, food safety and security.

'tomatoes I recently heard from a nutritionist that they are really lacking in nutrients because they are grown practically in builders sand these days, so I thought, right, try and buy organic tomatoes.'¹¹⁶

Food scandals such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), Foot and Mouth and the debate around genetically modified foods, which have been well documented by the media, and often sensationalised, also have an influence on changing food habits.

The BSE crisis, which is a relatively new disease found in cattle, triggered a concern for public health issues because of the risk associated with contracting the human variant of the disease,

¹¹² Regular Organic Consumer B

¹¹³ Occasional Organic Consumer E

¹¹⁴ Occasional Organic Consumer B

¹¹⁵ Regular Organic Consumer F

¹¹⁶ Regular Organic Consumer A

vCJD, commonly known at the time of its discovery as "mad cow disease". It is thought that vCJD in people has resulted from exposure to BSE, the most likely route being through the consumption of affected meat. This has elicited a variety of responses in consumers, ranging from a complete elimination of beef from the diet to opting to choose organic beef where available. Similarly, the 1988 Edwina Curry (then Health Minister) 'Salmonella in eggs scandal', where a public declaration claimed that most of Britain's egg production was infected with salmonella, triggered immense consumer concern. This scandal is remembered by many respondents and in some cases was a direct reason for changing food habits in favour of either organic or free range egg varieties.

Television programmes, documentaries and books about food, as well as written articles in specialist publications and in everyday press are all factors which feature in narratives about influencing decisions to change food habits.

This will be examined in further detail in section 5.2.

2.5 Conclusion: The place of organic consumption in changing food habits

In this section an attempt has been made to find patterns in the shopping habits, life histories, reference group influences, and lifecycle phases which explain through a rationale within the narratives, organic food preferences. Due to the selection criteria and screening process we have interviewed consumers who we expect to be food engaged and have found consumers from all three groups in our study who have rich and distinct food habits which have developed during a course of life cycle phases generally guided in the first instance by parents during formative years. What we don't find is much differentiation about why these particular consumers are food engaged but the suggestion is that it relates directly to early family life, values and experience.

Drawing on the ideas of Mary Douglas (1996)¹¹⁷ who stressed the role of commodities as communicators, we may expect regular organic consumers to aspire to be more food conscious and more concerned with eating fresh unprocessed food than occasional and non organic consumers. This has not been found to be the precise picture in the UK, and our study found consumers from all three groups communicate to have aspirations to eat a healthy diet of mainly homemade meals with a generous portion of fresh vegetables and fruit. There are differences in the interpretations and understandings about what constitutes a 'healthy meal' which may be a basis for differentiating the consumer groups. And there appears to more conscious healthy eating practice amongst regular and occasional consumers in comparison with non organic consumers. However, very few consumers' narratives feature stores about eating processed or junk food and those that do, eat this very occasionally as an exception to their normal food habits.

What emerges from our analyses is distinct differences within and between consumer groups in the ways that food is sourced, namely shopping habits. Within the groups of regular and occasional consumers, two subsets of 'alternatively orientated' and 'supermarket orientated' consumers have been identified as having different attitudes, values and practices relating to food shopping. Non consumers cannot be easily ascribed to either subset as they have a more eclectic approach to shopping.

¹¹⁷ Douglas, M., 1996. *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. Routledge, Oxon.

So it appears to be at the stage of food sourcing that food habits dramatically differ. What is apparent is that once food is sourced follow a similar course of patterns within the context of cooking and meals within the household.

Additionally, across all three consumer groups there appears to be a common ideal for naturally produced food, grown free from chemicals.

So what is different about a consumer who buys organic food? Well importantly regular organic consumers possess knowledge about organic production and trust for organic labelling. This may have been triggered by specific events which reinforced belief and conviction for organic and influences such as health, environmental concern and reference group identification. What also differs with regular organic consumers is a willingness to pay a price premium for organic food.

Life events which have the most dramatic effect on food habits are those associated with health, and serious illnesses such as cancer bring about a significant hyper awareness about food and the more subtle ways that chemicals can affect human health. This plays a huge role in triggering organic food habits. Pregnancy brings about significant change in food (and other health orientated) habits but doesn't specifically trigger organic food habits or acute hyper awareness about food but more general health awareness and common sense habits. For those regular consumers already consuming organically, the experience of pregnancy strengthens this conviction.

The regular organic consumers exercise specific knowledge about organic farming and aspire to demonstrate a concern for issues of ecology and possess a confidence in the benefits of the organic mode of production by buying organic produce. Regular organic consumers have at some stage been convinced that organic food is better.

Occasional organic consumers in this sample also express interest in environmental and ethical issues but do not necessarily view organic consumerism as the best way to demonstrate such concern. Some view local food or fair-trade products as superior to organic in terms of sustainable credentials.

Occasional consumers differ from regular consumers in the sense that they are not especially attracted to organic food; they are attracted to good quality food and whether it is organic or not is somehow not of major significance because there is a lack of trust in the label.

3. Mind-sets with regard to Organic Consumption

3.1 Thinking about organic food

Definitions, understandings and comments about production methods and characteristics of organic foods have been examined to understand the three consumer groups' theories and concepts with regard to organic food production. The aim of this section is to grasp how the different consumer groups vary in the ways they perceive the benefits and rewards that can be derived from consuming organic food.

Most of the consumers in our sample share basic ideas in their definitions about the production of organic food; as food produced without the use of chemicals or artificial pesticides and fertilisers. A small minority of regular consumers also included in their definition a concept of perceiving organic methods as supporting eco-system management.

What differs between and within the three consumer groups is the degree of trust and conviction that consumers have for organic food production. Trust predetermines how conceptions and characteristics of organic production are assessed and interpreted to produce benefits and rewards. Perspectives on benefits of organic production also indicate extent of consumer knowledge about and engagement with the subject matter. Gardner's terms *rewards* and *research*, can be applied to understand difference in assessment about benefits of organic food between consumers. Research plays a role in the development of conceptions of organic food and reflects the way benefits are assessed. It is clear that consumers' perceptions about rewards revolve around a core of trust.

The points on which consumers differ regard:

- A trust perspective, i.e. whether or not it is believed that production methods accord in practice with regulations and whether or not therefore any special benefits (at all) accrue to organic products.

This trust perspective is fundamentally important in determining the degree to which the following range of benefits are experienced and understood.

- A 'personal care' perspective, i.e. conceptions of personal benefits related to the consumption of organic products, such as a better taste or better general quality apart from better health
- An 'external care' perspective, i.e. conceptions of benefits to the environment or benefits related to animal welfare

Regular Organic Consumers

Concepts and Theories

The regular organic consumers in our sample tend to have a general but often vague overview about what organic production is, without on the whole having much technical accurate knowledge. There is one exceptional case of a regular consumer who possesses some more detailed knowledge about variation in pesticide usage between crops.

'When you know the pesticide is used on a particular crop it's worth paying the premium for organic. But for certain food you know not much pesticide is used anyway.'¹¹⁸

However, even in this case, knowledge is implicit rather than backed up with detailed evidence. Most regular consumers convey some knowledge about the soil association as the main certifying

¹¹⁸ Regular Organic Consumer B

body while describing organic production as being completely free from pesticides, fertilisers, genetically modified elements and general chemicals, while a minority acknowledge that organic standards do permit the use of some chemicals. A small minority of regular consumers possess knowledge about the land used in organic farming having to follow a period of conversion before it can be certified for organic production. Additionally a small minority of regular consumers articulate their understanding that organic production involves an aspect of animal welfare.

'I understand that it has not got pesticides and it's food that is produced without the use of pesticides and chemicals...as natural as it can be and it's also about animal welfare' ¹¹⁹

Trust for and conviction in organic food amongst regular consumers is therefore something consumers possess almost without much substantial evidence. It appears that trust is not derived from a high level of in depth knowledge. A general overview about the various aspects of organic production appears to be sufficient knowledge to elicit trust, enough to provide links between the values of organic practices and the benefits in light of both personal and external care concerns.

Research and Rewards

Regular consumers vary in their assessment of the benefits with regard to consuming organic food in relation to both personal and external care values. Dedicated consumers with complete conviction and trust in organic food are most likely to perceive a full spectrum of benefits, both personal and external.

Generally the regular consumers in this study speak about organic farming and organic products positively, although there is a degree of distaste articulated from a minority of regular consumers with regard to the marketing of organic food in contexts where an image of organic food as a luxury item for a privileged minority is portrayed.

'We used to have a deli round the corner when I lived in Bath, and they would have organic olives and things like organic chocolate. The image of organic food that most people get is that it's for the privileged.'¹²⁰

This perspective relates to the attitude, introduced in Section Two, of the 'alternatively orientated' consumers who are sceptical about the motives of big businesses selling organic food which they regard as solely profit-orientated. As well as a strong anti commercialism there appears to be a value for equality in the market place which is evident from articulations that ideally everyone should be able to afford organic food.

'I think it is over priced and I feel really bad, I think it's cutting out a whole load of people who can't afford it. I feel it's for middle classes and those on a low income can't benefit. It should be available for everyone.'¹²¹

This fits in with the perspective that there is a dichotomy between genuine organic food that is believed to be unpretentious, unprocessed, and unpackaged, and benefiting the 'common good', and the relatively new line of luxury, elitist organic food products which are fashionable, expensive and conspicuous.

¹¹⁹ Regular Organic Consumer I

¹²⁰ Regular Organic Consumer D

¹²¹ Regular Organic Consumer I

‘Personal Care’

Healthy Food

In terms of health benefits regular consumers articulate their understanding that organic food is better for personal health because organic food is viewed as ‘natural’ and ‘chemical free’.

‘A lot of it I think is because it’s perceived to be better for you, probably the number one thing’¹²²

The ways in which organic food is healthier are not explored in depth, but the implication is that organic food is perceived to contain fewer chemicals that are detrimental to human health than conventional produce.

‘For the vegetables it’s the pesticides, especially for young people as they absorb chemicals far more and they don’t know what it causes and what effects it can have.’¹²³

Narratives relating to health imply that because health risks associated with conventional produce are unknown, it makes intuitive sense to minimise risks by consuming organic food. The one exception where health benefits are explored in slightly more depth comes from the narrative of a regular organic consumer who has experienced breast cancer and has consequently carried out some research into the potential risks associated with chemicals in food.

‘For a while I bought organic carrots because I heard that they absorbed a lot of pesticides and organic pasta because I heard that there was a particular chemical that they used on the wheat fields that was particularly bad for you.’¹²⁴

Even in the case of this consumer, who possesses a hyper awareness about possible health risks associated with chemical residues in food, details about this link are not articulated in much depth. The narrative contains speculation rather than evidence to convey a belief that organic food is healthier. The very fact that fewer chemicals are used to produce organic food is enough to elicit a degree of trust and conviction and a perception that there will be preventative health benefits.

Tasty Food

Firm commitment to organic food is backed up with stories about the positive characteristics of organic products, such as taste. Regular consumers appear to selective understandings about how organic is better and these are in accordance with what they want to see.

Narratives from regular consumers often include descriptions concerning the superior taste of organic food. For consumers who have established a firm belief in and orientation towards organic food, better taste is an essential validating characteristic. In some cases this affirmation about organic taste involves a negative description of non organic goods which appears to be an exercise of over-zealous self persuasion.

‘Once you’ve had organic Corn Flakes... the taste is phenomenal... certainly the [conventional] Corn Flakes are terrible.... they’re just horrible’¹²⁵

¹²² Regular Organic Consumer E (2)

¹²³ Regular Organic Consumer I

¹²⁴ Regular Organic Consumer A

¹²⁵ Regular Organic Consumer E

Taste features in stories as a demonstration of how organic food is beneficial and good taste affirms the concept that organic food is 'good' and 'better'. Dedicated regular consumers who attempt to be 100% organic are more likely to accept the notion that organic food tastes better and give no indication that they wish to challenge this point. The positive characteristic of taste is also discussed as though it represents one element of justification for purchase: a reward for buying organic food. In this study organic carrots are spoken about in relation to taste more than any other food item, but the way they taste better is not described in detail. Stories about other people's experience of the better taste of organic food are made reference to by consumers to communicate a sense that this is a commonly shared objective viewpoint.

'When you eat organic strawberries or carrots the taste is so incredibly different. We go to the organic food fair in Bristol every year and they do blindfolded taste tests and the children eat organic and non organic and say which do you like better and they go for the organic straight away - there is a definite difference. It tastes so much nicer.'¹²⁶

Food items such as eggs are mentioned for better taste by regular organic consumers. A nicer taste and the distinct and attractive physical appearance of organic eggs backs up a belief that they must be healthier. This perception of rewards and the links that are made between one reward and another can be seen in light of Gardner's concept of re-description. Re-description, according to Gardner, is something people will experience when they are developing a mind set about a certain phenomenon. Re-describing something involves perceiving something in an extra positive light because it also fulfils and reinforces other values. So a consumer believing organic food to be especially tasty, attractive in appearance and also healthy produces multiple verification that it really is better than non organic food. Again attributing such favourable characteristics to organic food appears to be a way of finding evidence that organic food really is better, which can be viewed as part of a process of self persuasion.

'Egg-wise, we are convinced that they taste better and they look better when we cook them, different colour. We have both eggs in the house from supermarkets free range eggs organic and the organic one. And which ever ones we cook at the same time the organic egg is bright orange in the middle, they look healthier.'¹²⁷

Some regular consumers also talk about the influence that taste has on the initial decision to start buying organic food. This suggests that there is a collective assumption that organic food tastes better, even before a test has been carried out and evidence has been collected.

'I don't think there is a difficulty convincing people that organic tastes better. I think people actually think it does even if they have tried it or haven't tried it.'¹²⁸

The conviction that many regular consumer articulate about a better taste relates importantly to the concept of trust. Trust in organic food, the production methods and labelling underpins regular consumers' commitment to buying it. Expectations about better taste form part of this trust based on an assumption and belief that the food is purer, unadulterated and closer to nature.

However, one exceptional regular consumer does not take this reputation for superior taste as fool proof, which indicates how the process of questioning and re-visiting the arena of food occurs continuously and opinions may be brought into question. As Gardner argues, all changes

¹²⁶ Regular Organic Consumer I

¹²⁷ Regular Organic Consumer D

¹²⁸ Regular Organic Consumer D

of mind involve some resistance. Not every regular consumer will aim to persuade themselves initially about the taste benefits of organic food.

‘I think it has always been that question of does it taste any better?’¹²⁹

This question arises during the narrative after the consumer has explored the kinds of organic food consumed and reasons why. Interestingly, this consumer is someone who consumes organic food mainly due to reasons of quality and taste. On the one hand there is an acceptance that organic food does taste better, but on the other hand, an indication that trust in this characteristic is not blind; the consumer is not simply gullible but that a conscious evaluation process about taste and quality takes place.

Aesthetics

Regular consumers explain that it is not only taste but the overall aesthetic appeal of the food which is important. As has already been discussed, it appears that the positive appearance of organic food reinforces a conviction about other benefits, such as health.

For some ‘alternatively orientated’ and ‘supermarket orientated’ consumers’ this appreciation for aesthetics stretches beyond the physical characteristics of the food and includes the packaging (or lack of packaging), the appearance (in line with expectations about how organic food should look – e.g. vegetables covered in soil) as well as the atmosphere of the shopping environment.

‘As well, which is important to me, I would say tastes and textures and aesthetics, I am really affected by aesthetics.’¹³⁰

There are general views about the characteristics of organic fruit as misshapen and perhaps visually un-appealing but most regular organic consumers will generally have accepted and assimilated this fact into their mind set about organic food, and will not be put off by this characteristic alone.

‘I suppose the visual thing was quite obvious like apples aren’t uniform they aren’t perfect at first so you have to train your eye and remember they should be like that.’¹³¹

Aesthetics don’t necessarily put consumers off organic food but there is an implication that a negative appearance of fruit and vegetables may denote inferior quality and judgement may be based initially on appearance. In these scenarios food choices for the regular consumer will be driven more by overall quality and perceived enjoyment than by a commitment to buying organic.

‘I don’t mind it being ugly but textures are important to me and if it’s soggy I don’t like it and so I will be precious and make a non organic choice. I will compromise because I want to be able to at the end of the day enjoy the taste of it, so there you go.’¹³²

This demonstrates that a commitment towards organic food is not also always completely fixed and food opinions are subject to continuous reappraisal and change. It also indicates the importance of satisfaction and enjoyment in the development of a positive mind set about organic food and for continuous purchasing habits.

¹²⁹ Regular Organic Consumer D

¹³⁰ Regular organic consumer F

¹³¹ Regular organic consumer G

¹³² Occasional organic consumer D

‘External care’

Good Food

When describing organic food production and characteristics, there is a common pattern for regular consumers to speak with positive favour about the organic mode of production. Organic food is considered to be ‘grown in a good way’¹³³, ‘produced well’¹³⁴ ‘grown in good soil’ the ‘animals are treated better’¹³⁵ and ‘farmed in much better conditions’¹³⁶.

Such attributes of organic farming are not verified with specific examples but regular consumers’ belief in organic food appears to revolve around the trust that is evidently such a prominent feature in the narratives from this group.

‘Goodness’ is described by regular consumers to convey their trust in organic farming methods. There is a tendency for organic practices to be perceived as intrinsically including responsible practices for people, animals and planet. This concept fits in with the core motivations underlying most regular consumers’ organic habits.

‘Trying to do the right thing for your-self and for the world’¹³⁷

Real Food

Regular consumers stress the concept of authenticity as a characteristic of organic food in the sense that ‘organic is actually proper food’, ‘has kind of been left to its own devices’¹³⁸, ‘it is real food’¹³⁹ ‘as natural as it can be’¹⁴⁰; ‘fresh, clean [and] produced in a natural way’¹⁴¹.

‘It is actually the way that all food should be produced, which is the true traditional farming way.’¹⁴²

As well as being authentic, ‘real food’ also denotes food that is produced with minimal negative environmental impact, with provision towards animal welfare, relating to ethical business as well as local self reliance. Such values are included in perceptions about what ‘natural’ food means.

This concept of real food also suggests that there is a common value for food that is pure and uncontaminated with chemicals. Organic food conforms to set standards providing a degree of transparency in terms of production methods that most conventional produce do not possess. This satisfies a consumer desire for peace of mind which inspires consumer trust.

Occasional Organic Consumers

Concepts and Theories

¹³³ Regular Organic Consumer G

¹³⁴ Regular Organic Consumer D

¹³⁵ Regular Organic Consumer I

¹³⁶ Regular Organic Consumer I

¹³⁷ Regular Organic Consumer E (2)

¹³⁸ Regular Organic Consumer G

¹³⁹ Regular Organic Consumer D

¹⁴⁰ Regular Organic Consumer I

¹⁴¹ Regular Organic Consumer D

¹⁴² Non Organic Consumer B

Occasional consumers in general show as much understanding about the term ‘organic’ as regular consumers and elaborate as much in their definitions, but express less certainty and affirmative trust for what the concept or label of organic actually denotes in practice. This suggests that they have not fully made up their mind about what they think about organic food, and do not value all organic food in a consistent or committed way due to a degree of scepticism.

The ‘good’ attribute of true organic food is also suggested explicitly by occasional consumers. Put simply by one occasional consumer; organic food is ‘nice and good’. In this instance it refers to a direct purchase from a producer who is trusted. Occasional organic consumers’ articulate that they would ideally prefer food which is free from chemicals but what differs between them and the regular consumer in this study is the extent to which they have trust for the organic food they have available to them and more generally for the organic label itself.

There are fewer occasional consumers of organic food who demonstrate some in-depth knowledge about organic production than in the regular consumer group. However there is one exceptional case of the secondary household member of an occasional consumer who demonstrates specific knowledge about chemicals permitted in organic farming.

‘As a gardener I’ve looked into the organic type of growing and I know you can be Soil Association certified but still use derris and a whole heap of not very environmentally friendly products...It’s either anti fungal or anti bacterial or anti parasite. I know it’s bad...horticultural soap kills ladybird larvae and that’s supposed to be organic but it’s not really it kills aquatic life and you still have to wash the vegetables. The Soil Association say it’s okay to use and you can still be certified organic if you use it.’¹⁴³

This consumer is unusual in the degree of engagement she has with organic food production methods because she grows her own food. The evidence provided conveys an opinion that organic food is not as pure as it’s marketed to be and there is a lack of benefit perceived because it is not believed to be substantially safer or healthier than conventional produce. The message communicated is that it is a waste of time to buy organic versions of certain items such as potatoes, and importantly this consumer feels the expense is tremendous.

Generally, knowledge about organic standards including a dimension about animal welfare is mentioned by some occasional consumers in particular with reference to chicken production but only minimally in reference to meat. There is an exceptional case of an occasional consumer who views organic meat production as a ‘personal care’ benefit because the meat will taste better and is better quality, rather than an ‘external care’ benefit showing a deep concern for the suffering of the animals.

‘Extra stuff that’s added to it... it’s not necessarily an animal rights thing although it’s good to know it’s had a happy life in a way and you can taste the difference in the way animals are fed.’¹⁴⁴

Research and Rewards

Occasional consumers like regular consumers articulate their assessments of organic food in relation to rewards revolving around ‘personal care’ and ‘external care’. Again, the degree to which rewards and benefits are experienced relates importantly to the degree of trust a consumer has for organic production. There are two subsets of occasional consumers, those who have trust in the methods and those who are sceptical about organic production and labelling. The ‘trust’

¹⁴³ Occasional Organic Consumer B

¹⁴⁴ Occasional Organic Consumer E

orientated consumers accept that organic production methods may have some benefits for animal welfare, human health as well as environmental issues. The 'sceptical' subset appear to have less belief in the system of organic food production, which means they doubt the apparent virtues of this production mode. Benefits which are experienced by this 'sceptical' subset are articulated with a degree of reservation suggesting they are not fully convinced about the 'personal care' or 'external care' merits of organic food.

'Personal Care'

Health and Safety

In terms of the personal benefit of 'health' associated with organic food, most occasional consumers narratives in this sample do not explicitly demonstrate that they link organic food with better health, although there are cases which appear to be suggesting that reasons for organic consumption are related to health. There is an Empty Nesting Couple who buy organic milk once a fortnight for they believe it is safer and therefore healthier than conventional milk due to its minimal chemical content.

'There was a very important occurrence a few years ago called Chernobyl where I became aware of how rapidly events that occur polluting the environment can very rapidly be absorbed into the food chain and in particular into milk very very quickly. So it was one of the things that made me realise that milk absorbs (I may be wrong on this) pollutants...pollutants in the environment become passed onto the milk fairly quickly so it's one of the things that I feel happy purchasing',¹⁴⁵

The principal shopper in this household is sceptical about organic food but the habit exists as a preventative safety measure to possibly avoid or limit potential health risks. Importantly this practice of organic food consumption is framed within the context that the price differential between organic milk and conventional milk is minimal.

Other occasional consumers who buy specific organic food products, such as organic eggs, also imply that they are doing so for reasons of safety and trust, which can be linked to health. In the case of eggs influence can be linked to the Salmonella in eggs food scandal from the late 1980's.

Super-market orientated occasional consumers who trust in organic and aspire to consume more organic food, tend to make explicit links between organic food and healthy living. Knowledge about the health benefits of organic food is minimal. However, evidence from video footage of a shopping trip of one such occasional consumer, revealed that food labels were not looked at in-depth while shopping and some products were assumed to be organic when they actually were not. This supports the notion that occasional consumers are less likely to seek information than regular and dedicated consumers.

Additionally, 'supermarket orientated' occasional consumers communicate they would perhaps like to buy more organic food but that in terms of health benefits, there is a belief that it is perhaps too late to make a difference to your health as an adult.

'I have grown up eating non organic food, and most of the trouble is done during your adolescence when you are growing because you are developing aren't you? Your brain has developed by the time you are an adult so most of the effects that they worry about are for children.' ¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Occasional Organic Consumer F

¹⁴⁶ Occasional Organic Consumer B

This is an interesting perspective as the consumer links his rationale directly with his childhood experience of food. This supports the notion that food habits formed in early life have a considerable impact on adulthood food habits.

Taste

Occasional consumers differ on the whole from regular consumers who make bold statements about the superior taste of organic food. The few occasional consumers who articulate better taste are from the 'trust orientated' subset. They are only inclined to acknowledge better taste with respect to certain organic products.

'My husband...he's quite happy to have organic food. It's tastier. He does agree that it's taster, like carrots and stuff.'¹⁴⁷

The better taste of organic food is also expressed for food items such as meat and chicken. Organic chicken comes up frequently as a taste favourite.

'We bought an organic chicken, it had proper legs on it, as opposed to little legs you get on a battery fed chicken. That was a real shock, and the sponginess of the meat that you usually get with a reared chicken, a factory produced thing. Compared to the texture of organic meat was just phenomenal, unbelievable.'¹⁴⁸

However, 'sceptical' occasional consumers of organic food are unlikely to express differences in taste between organic and conventional products. Where better taste is talked about, it is generally not explained in relation to the organic label but the freshness or free range aspect of the food.

'Organic chicken is not as good as the free range chicken in terms of taste.'¹⁴⁹

In some instances concepts about better taste are completely deconstructed. There is a willingness to point out that lack of better taste provides evidence that scepticism about the genuine authenticity of organic food is well founded.

'Actually I can't taste...organic eggs don't taste fantastic. I don't know how those chickens have really lived because there is no real traceability.'¹⁵⁰

'I don't know if I ever made an effort to buy organic because it was organic.'¹⁵¹

The higher price of organic products is a consideration which is emphasised by occasional consumers in both the 'trust' and 'sceptical' subsets and is frequently given as a reason for not buying organic products.

'External Care'

¹⁴⁷ Occasional Organic Consumer D

¹⁴⁸ Occasional Organic Consumer C

¹⁴⁹ Occasional Organic Consumer F (2)

¹⁵⁰ Occasional Organic Consumer A

¹⁵¹ Occasional Organic Consumer E

Approximately half of the occasional consumers in the UK sample appear to be more concerned with animal welfare issues, the sustainability/environmental and social aspects of food production than they are about personal care benefits such as health or taste.

'I don't particularly want to know nutrition information...I think sourcing is a more useful label than nutrition information. I think it is important to be able to look at a product and find out where it has come from, which country it has come from. I almost think it's more important to go down that avenue, the local sustainability avenue.'¹⁵²

Arguments relating to 'external care' demonstrate a commitment to ethical, global and local issues and form part of an illustration that some most important organic benefits relate to citizen-consumer issues broader benefits than those merely at the individual level.

'Putting others first effectively...and Fair Trade is putting someone else over my own [health]...'¹⁵³

Non Organic Consumers

Concepts and Theories

Non organic consumers are less likely to speak about the positive aspects of organic production when they define the concept of organic food. All consumers in this group have a similar understanding of the term organic as the members in the other groups. A basic overview is communicated about organic farming as being free from pesticides and chemicals. Most of this group express some confusion in their understanding of the practice of organic farming.

'I can't really work out how farmers can say that things are organic when fertilisers can travel in the air ...I don't think it tastes any different and I think the cost is ridiculous and I can't really understand why organic food costs so much more than other food. I really like the principle of organic food but I can't see how it works.'¹⁵⁴

'I'm a little bit confused by the term organic... I've heard that producers that call themselves organic can use some kind of pesticides and fertilisers as long as they are not chemicals...so I am confused...'¹⁵⁵

It appears that the confusion experienced by non consumers relates to an attitude of mistrust for organic food products. There is a tendency for non consumers to convey in their narratives that they identify with anti commercial principles, in the sense that they see food as a material devoid of fashion or frill, as raw ingredients that are purchased not because of their branding or label but for the simple principals of freshness and necessity. The exception to this pattern is found in relation to non consumers' consumption of fair trade food products which the majority of non consumers report to occasionally purchase. There is a common articulation of sympathy for the social cause which underpins the Fair Trade principle and non consumers imply they are more willing to support this than buy organic food.

Organic food, in contrast to Fair Trade food, is seen by non organic consumers as expensive and fancy, suggesting organic food products are for a more conspicuous consumer. Additionally, suspicion for the organic industry relates to disapproval for big supermarkets financial interest.

¹⁵² Occasional Organic Consumer A

¹⁵³ Occasional Organic Consumer B

¹⁵⁴ Non Organic Consumer B

¹⁵⁵ Non Organic Consumer C

'I think that someone is making money from it especially now that the big supermarket are so heavily involved...I really don't want to buy into that...' ¹⁵⁶

Concerns that relate to the topic of food are centred more around issues of development, poverty and environmental issues. Because there is also less concern for health risks associated with chemical residues in food, the possible health benefit associated with organic food is not explored in the narratives of non consumers. In conformance with occasional consumers, non consumers appear to place more importance on 'External Care' than 'Personal Care'.

'I wouldn't buy organic products...there are things that I think are more important than the label organic. If I think about ethical food organic isn't a priority.' ¹⁵⁷

Non organic consumers in our sample clearly consider ethical dimensions to decisions about products when shopping and the majority demonstrate that they are engaged in food issues. However, the combination of mistrust for and resistance towards organic food clearly operates as a barrier towards consuming organic food. The impression given in the narratives is that if there was more clarity for the external benefits of organic food non organic consumers may be more receptive to and less dismissive of organic products.

Research and Rewards

As previously discussed non consumers of organic food in this sample do not really touch upon the concept of the 'personal care' benefit of health apart from one comment which describes organic food as containing 'less toxins' ¹⁵⁸. This concept is not expanded on to demonstrate an argument for organic consumption.

What is striking in similarity with the group of non consumers of organic food in this sample is a common belief that it is a myth that organic food really tastes better. What also prevails is the expression of a lack of trust for the marketing of organic food goods. There is some suggestion that some organic produce may be the best quality available and that the production techniques may be preferable but overriding dissatisfaction is experienced due to the inaccessibility because of high cost, lack of trust and therefore a lack of substantial perceivable rewards. In terms of external benefits such as the environment, social concerns and animal welfare are issues that come up in narratives but without specific reference to organic production.

3.2 Assessing Organic Foods

Regular organic food consumers' narratives feature accounts of emotional and practical reasons for purchasing organic food important in processes of changing minds and behaviours in respect to food habits.

The analysis of narratives regarding satisfaction and dissatisfaction with organic products show how reasons for organic food habits are influenced by positive and negative experiences and how such experiences contribute to the development of concepts and theories about organic food. If a person is making up their mind about organic food the experience operates as a form of research, part of a collection of relevant data which may complement an argument or discredit it.

¹⁵⁶ Non Organic Consumer C

¹⁵⁷ Non Organic Consumer C

¹⁵⁸ Non Organic Consumer A

It is relevant to make a distinction between levels of changes of mind: value-based reasons and practical reasons and rewards. The 'value-based reasons' are related to positive generic concepts associated with organic production and products (sustainability, animal welfare, etc.), but are not necessarily linked to the consumer's actual purchasing habits. Rather they are idealistic or emotional preconditions that can contribute to the development of regular and loyal organic purchasing habits. Practical reasons and rewards include changes of mind attributed to better availability, lower price, better taste / quality (and possibly more).

The section will examine the emotional value based reasons in mind changing as well as the practical reasons based on the positive and negative product characteristics of organic food, availability and convenience. In most cases regular organic food consumers incorporate both practical and emotional reasons into a rationale for their organic habits.

Value Based Reasons for Mind Change

As described in the previous section, regular consumers of organic food are the group that are marginally most knowledgeable about organic production have most trust and conviction in this method and also speak most about the external rewards such as ethics, animal welfare and environmental sustainability as relevant benefits experienced through organic consumption.

Ethics

The ethics of food features substantially in narratives detailing value based reasons for adopting regular organic food habits. Ethics cover social values about how an enterprise is organisationally structured, whether a company sources local or fairly traded produce, how environmentally friendly it is, and how much it can be trusted generally. Ethics provide food with additional worth beyond the intrinsic value as a consumable product, because ethics offer consumers a sense that they have made a contribution towards an important 'External Care' cause. Consumers who can afford to spend time and resources thinking about and acting upon food issues are more likely to consider ethics.

The narratives of some regular organic food consumers (often higher income) include stories about ethical consumerism. They believe in the concept of being active citizens in their shopping habits; through the shopping arena they are exercising their power to resist and support certain products and their associated modes of production. In these cases the change towards organic food habits involves ethical reasons demonstrated by a belief that consumers can vote with their shopping trolleys, take personal responsibility and take action which demonstrates a commitment to values such as ecological wellbeing and animal welfare.

'Yes I've always believed in voting with your shopping basket. We did that in fair trade week. If there is more demand they will start putting more products on the shelves. The reason I go to the farmer's market is to support the small producer. I think it's really important I love to support local businesses so they don't go under. Not only do I enjoy it but it helps the little person, supporting the local farmer.'¹⁵⁹

Animal Welfare

¹⁵⁹ Regular Organic Consumer I

Generally the regular consumers in our sample who speak about ethics also speak about animal welfare. Regular, occasional and non organic consumers all speak to some degree about animal welfare as a food ideal or preference but not all will relate this to organic food. Narratives indicate that changes of mind in relation to animal welfare can be emotional and abrupt and may be triggered by channels of information from real life events such as documentary film footage showing brutal and disturbing images.

‘After that programme I am not buying, when you can pay another £1.50 for an organic one I will. Definitely yeah, that programme taught me that much, that £1.50 is nothing compared to the welfare of the poor chicken’¹⁶⁰

The jolting impact of such media can transform shopping habits and turn animal welfare into a sought for ideal or preference. For more affluent consumers this may be enough to trigger a sudden change.

‘I only buy organic chicken because of what I saw on television. I think it’s disgusting, inhuman, really inhuman.’¹⁶¹

As previously introduced an additional reason is the better taste associated with animals that are well treated and taste is mentioned by consumers in the context of animal welfare. Concepts surrounding animal welfare also touch upon notions about whether an animal has led a ‘happy life’ because of what they are fed and this is cited as important because of the well being of the animal and the subsequent taste of the meat. There is also the notion of food safety and some narratives suggest that organic foods are considered safer.

‘In the sense that I buy organic... that is a high level of protection if you like.’¹⁶²

For those on lower incomes a real world event like a television programme alone may not be enough for animal welfare to become a crucial buying motive. A change in shopping behaviour may require additional reasons at a more mundane level to bring a goal into reach. A drop in price may well function as a ‘tipping point’ with regard to a decision.

‘We’ve both got siblings who are interested in ethics and organic and what not and I saw Hugh Fernley Whittingstall he did a whole programme devoted to the mass production of chickens at supermarkets and the same week I’d seen a price reduction of free range chickens and I said that’s it then.’¹⁶³

This resonates with Gardner’s argument that resources and rewards have to complement each other for a change of mind to occur and the consequential behaviour to take place.

The non organic food consumers in our sample speak about animal welfare as an aspirational ideal and for most of this group this ideal is not achieved due to cost constraints.

‘If I have got the money then I will buy free range. Like if I have had... payday was last Friday, so those eggs are from when I had about £3 and I had to eat for a few days, and you know I couldn’t afford to spend £1 on six eggs rather than a£1 on 15 eggs. So it’s basically down to that.’¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Occasional Organic Consumer B

¹⁶¹ Occasional Organic Consumer D

¹⁶² Regular Organic Consumer B

¹⁶³ Occasional Organic Consumer B

¹⁶⁴ Non Organic Consumer A

In exception there is one non organic consumer who has adapted her shopping behaviour to favour free-range eggs triggered initially by the Edwina Curry egg scandal, backed up by concerns about animal welfare and the experience of free range eggs that taste nicer.

'I tend to get free range eggs as we have a caravan and we get the eggs from the farm and they are free range eggs down there and they do, I think, taste nicer so when we are home we also get free range eggs. The [chickens] lead happier lives.'¹⁶⁵

Another type of event which features in stories and has caused a jolting change in food habits are farm visits. Often a visit to an organic farm involves learning about conventional farming techniques and can bring about a realisation that mass production of meat and the slaughter of animals in abattoirs do not consider the welfare of animals. This has in some cases spurred a move to a vegetarian diet and in other cases towards sourcing organic chicken, meat and eggs.

'Having been to see these chickens it was lovely, they had two very big sheds where they could go when they wanted...since seeing them I wouldn't ever buy eggs that weren't organic and free range. Free range, it doesn't quite...it's not the same rules as organic and free range; you can get away with more chickens to a square meter in free range. Organic free range is much better for the chicken.'¹⁶⁶

In terms of animal welfare it is chicken and eggs that are mentioned most by consumers as products which are always bought free-range due to concerns about cruel production conditions.

Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism features a lot in the narratives of regular consumers of organic food in our sample but rarely in those of occasional and non consumers. Vegetarianism is generally related to values about animal welfare and those who believe strongly in the fair treatment of animals are either vegetarian themselves, have been vegetarian in the past or have a close vegetarian family member or friend. In narratives of regular consumers who are or have been vegetarian the initial trigger is directly related to information about animal welfare or environmental issues.

'I suppose I was very "I'm going to save the world" I was really into green issues. I just stuck with it and it became second nature.'¹⁶⁷

'I was vegetarian for about a year and a half...That was because I read the chicken article.'¹⁶⁸

In this case vegetarianism is temporarily adopted due to lack of trust in the meat industry and the narrative confirms that meat was re-introduced into the diet once a reliable, trustworthy butcher was found. The article referred to (chicken article) documents the chicken processing industry in the UK and the main problem documented is that of possible risk of food poisoning caused by chicken consumption. Therefore the relationship to and possible benefit for personal health is likely to have been a central motivation and reward for changing food habits.

Other regular organic consumers' however relate vegetarianism, animal welfare and organic food habits, to notions of a spiritual ideal about the earth, nature and notions of Buddhist philosophy.

'Feeling it was wrong to eat dead things... I read a lot about health and food and Zen Buddhism so it was connected with reading and ideas about a better world and ideas about be[ing] self sufficient, if more people were vegetarian. It was a whole thing, a whole movement...then'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Non Organic Consumer B

¹⁶⁶ Regular Organic Consumer E

¹⁶⁷ Regular Organic Consumer B

¹⁶⁸ Regular Organic Consumer E

The notion of adopting organic food habits because it ‘feels’ right is a value based reason which does not offer any tangible, practical or physical rewards. In our sample a number of regular consumers speak about the spiritual dimension in their food practices. Interestingly spirituality in relation to food habits does not feature in the narratives of the occasional or non organic consumers in our sample.

Environmental Issues

Environmentalism is also a value based reason in mind assessing organic food. It is unusual that environmental issues actually spur a rapid mind change in favour of organic but complement other practical and emotional reasons such as seasonality and traceability and contributes to an overall assessment about organic food.

Food miles, packaging and recycling are the environmental issues that crop up the most and are considered important for consumers who aspire to minimising their negative impact on the planet. Organic is generally seen as ‘better for the planet’¹⁷⁰ for some regular consumers while others are clear to add that this is only true if the food is not shipped half way around the world. For dedicated regular organic consumers local, regional, seasonal produce will be considered better to buy than organic because of the negative effect of food miles.

Occasional consumers of organic food in our sample speak more about local food than regular consumers and they use the fact about food miles of imported organic food as a reason to not trust organic food.

‘It’s sustainable if it’s not intensive farming and it’s not being shipped from overseas and it’s sustainable if it going to support people’s livelihoods here.’¹⁷¹

The support for local produce is so strong that imported organic and non organic food items are seen as environmentally unfriendly, untrustworthy and untraceable; ‘coming from somewhere where I don’t know how it has been grown or whose been paid to produce it’¹⁷².

Non organic consumers’ narratives also feature elements concerning environmental issues, concern for food miles and again aspirations to consume locally grown produce.

‘I think supermarkets ought to import less. The planet is being ruined because of the big supermarkets just moving things when we could grow things ourselves... We do buy things that are in season, I wouldn’t buy strawberries in the winter for instance. I always buy English strawberries and English anything, we are really into recycling and saving the environment and the travel cost of moving a bit of cabbage over here is ridiculous. I usually go for locally grown but I do buy New Zealand braeburn apples and bananas we buy.’¹⁷³

‘Practical Based Reasons’

Availability

¹⁶⁹ Regular Organic Consumer H

¹⁷⁰ Regular Organic Consumer H

¹⁷¹ Occasional Organic Consumer A

¹⁷² Occasional Organic Consumer A

¹⁷³ Non Organic Consumer B

An important practical based reason given for the change in food habits in favour of organic food is how easy and accessible it is to buy. The increase in availability makes the value-based reasons for aspiring to consume organic food possible.

Regular consumers' especially the 'supermarket-orientated' point out their observation of how much more accessible organic food has become in the last ten years, especially the 'supermarket orientated' consumers who talk about this development in the market with enthusiasm, and express optimism that organic ranges within supermarkets are continuously improving. This conveys a trust in the supermarkets and their involvement within the organic market as well as integral trust for the organic label.

'Over time...decisions have been influenced... its got a lot easier, so now organic couscous, Sainsbury's organic couscous, Sainsbury's organic rice, they have got their 'Sainsbury's Organic' range, its really easy to find. With Waitrose it's easy to find because I just know the stores. Marks and Spencer's are continuously improving their ranges, so it's become easier and it's become less expensive.'¹⁷⁴

'there is far more available from your beans to your pasta you can get it everywhere you used to really have to hunt for example for bread...'¹⁷⁵

'Supermarket orientated' regular consumers who are often pressurised for time make a point of indicating how the ease of being able to find organic products within the realm of the supermarket is a major bonus and they offer their approval for this kind of progress within the organic market. In contrast the 'alternatively orientated' regular consumers treat the recent availability of organic food within supermarkets with suspicion and imply it may be indicative of unsavoury profiteering. Although this group of consumers tends to avoid the supermarket on a matter on principle there is some acknowledgement about the challenges involved in shopping for organic food in smaller outlets in terms of availability.

'I think he is still a little bit restricted by only shopping organically and in health food shops... for example the butchers, if you go on the wrong day there's not always any meat there you know, you have to be better organised. It's not quite so convenient.'¹⁷⁶

Occasional consumers express less satisfaction for organic availability than regular consumers and stress availability as one factor to explain their infrequency of purchase as well to support a claim that more organic food will be purchased in the future. For the 'supermarket orientated' occasional consumers stories include incidences of supermarkets running out of organic items which is clearly an important obstacle to convenient and regular purchasing.

'Yeah I'll buy more, I will try to buy more and more organic, but only because there's more and more available, because availability is still the issue.'¹⁷⁷

Alongside availability the increase in the promotion of organic food has impacted on people's reasons to consume it; especially in the context of the supermarket.

'Nowadays you have the organic section in the supermarket and it's pretty much surrounded in flashing neon lights'¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Regular Organic Consumer F

¹⁷⁵ Regular Organic Consumer I

¹⁷⁶ Regular Organic Consumer E (2)

¹⁷⁷ Occasional Organic Consumer B

¹⁷⁸ Occasional organic Consumer B

‘Alternatively orientated’ occasional consumers narratives so not include much about dissatisfaction with organic availability. Those that do speak about it, relate lack of organic food availability to the scenario of shopping at farmers’ markets where the majority of the food is local and seasonal but on the whole not organic. This, however, is not perceived to be a problem, as occasional consumers from this subset deliberately and consciously choose to consume in a way that they believe is sustainable and this is not necessarily through buying organic food.

It is important to point out that notions about availability vary and this depends somewhat on shopping location. The mass availability of organic food in most multiple retailer supermarkets does not affect those who choose to avoid such locations. Perhaps location is of less significance than the amount of research and shopping visits a consumer is willing to carry out to establish where organic is available. For some occasional consumers putting this much effort into food sourcing is simply not convenient.

Quality, Labelling and Brand

‘Supermarket orientated’ regular consumers who purchase packaged organic food, the organic label is important and operates like a brand. In this context ‘organic’ food represents good quality.

‘I think what will happen eventually is that the organic food will just be the same price as the other food, but organic will be a Trade Mark for any kind of food that’s produced well... Organic is a quality mark maybe that’s what organic means to me.’¹⁷⁹

‘Supermarket orientated’ regular consumers are motivated by convenience and tend to practice relatively structured shopping habits which means preference for branded products (whether organic or not) is indicative of how brands can assist the shopping task and make the negotiation of the often confusing shopping arena easier and more efficient. Within this group examples of satisfaction for organic food features stories about favourite organic brands which suggests also that these consumers like to establish food routines, they appreciate the predictability that comes with branded food and will keep buying a product that fulfils taste criteria and is available and convenient as well.

‘I only tried them (Yeo Valley Organic yoghurt) quite recently and I loved them so I only buy these ones now. They’re not too sweet but really creamy.’¹⁸⁰

The function that brands have allowing consumers to easily identify quality with packaging and develop trust for a product thus making shopping quicker and easier is also demonstrated by stories about satisfaction with non organic brands.

‘I find Kellogg’s taste better...they genuinely taste better and that’s probably reflected in the cost of them. There are lots of stories about it’s the same product but it’s put in a different box. But I don’t believe it’s true’¹⁸¹

Within the context of the supermarket there is some suggestion that the organic label in itself operates in the way a brand does. This relates to trust that a consumer has for the organic food brand and those who do trust in the organic label hold a common view that organic is better quality. ‘Alternatively orientated’ regular consumers tend to be selective when purchasing organic

¹⁷⁹ Regular Organic Consumer D

¹⁸⁰ Regular Organic Consumer G

¹⁸¹ Regular Organic Consumer D

food because they do not trust in the genuineness of the organic label and believe that supermarkets use the label mainly to make profit.

Stories which feature branded food and product satisfaction either include positive association for brands because of value for a company's ethical policy or practical satisfaction with a branded item because 'they taste lovely'¹⁸² or are convenient purchases.

Occasional consumers in our sample tend not to display any kind of brand satisfaction or loyalty. On the whole they tend to buy organic products direct from producers rather than from supermarkets, avoiding branded products. However there is an exceptional case of a 'supermarket orientated' occasional organic consumer who shops in supermarkets and speaks about organic food as though it is a brand. This consumer's orientation towards brands is validated in the narrative of the secondary household member.

'He is a brand boy. He absolutely loves brands. He won't buy anything other than Heinz beans and Heinz tomato ketchup and Hellman's mayonnaise. I think the organic interest is something to do with the way that he perceives that as being the best quality.'¹⁸³

'Alternatively orientated' occasional consumers in our study express mistrust for labels and supermarket's promotional techniques, which explains why they are less willing to accept widely available and mass produced items of organic food remaining unconvinced and unsure about the real benefits of organic produce and instead favouring fresh (sometimes organic) produce direct from farmers markets which is devoid of packaging. A rejection of branded food is part of an anti commercial attitude that many 'alternatively orientated' consumers convey by communicating they will not be hoodwinked by big businesses who set out to manipulate their spending.

Non organic consumers' narratives in similarity, feature little positive about food brand. This is partly because of the premium cost the consumer pays for brands, as well as a rationalisation that they are no better. There is also a suggestion that brands are produced by businesses in an attempt to fool the consumer into conspicuous consumption.

'No I don't buy anything [branded]. It doesn't worry me... cost has a lot to do with it. I think quite often supermarket own brands are as good and cheaper. Probably made by the same people but with different labels.'¹⁸⁴

This corresponds with the cynicism and lack of trust that non organic consumers articulate in relation to organic food.

Taste

Stories about satisfaction with organic food often feature testimonies about the superior taste of organic food in comparison to conventional variants. Consumers' assessments of food in relation to taste are a favourite way to convey resonance about the decision to buy organic.

'When you eat organic strawberries or carrots the taste is so incredibly different.'¹⁸⁵

'Reinforcement when someone tastes, for example I think the reinforcement happens all the time, you get an organic tomato, you get a normal tomato, you can taste the difference.'¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Regular Organic Consumer G

¹⁸³ Occasional Organic Consumer B

¹⁸⁴ Non Organic Consumer B

¹⁸⁵ Regular Organic Consumer I

The colour and the smell of organic fruit and vegetables are also quoted as points of satisfaction which support the concept that organic food is more authentic, closer to nature.

In the cases where non consumers have tried organic food (when it has been on special offer) comments on dissatisfaction with organic food have been in terms of expectations not having been met. There maybe a mythical expectation that organic food should taste better but the reality does not tally with this.

Health

When assessing organic food most regular consumers' narratives include a perception that there may be health benefits from eating organic food. Generally regular consumers' have conviction about organic food as being free from pesticide residues and possessing 'natural' and 'pure' characteristics viewed as better for personal health. This health characteristic of organic food plays a significant role for consumers especially during various life cycle phases such as the beginning of adulthood when starting a family as well as later on in life and facilitates organic consumption especially when complemented with other practical factors like availability and affordability.

'I think I felt a little bit more health conscious and the affordability thing was a factor and also just the awareness that things like organic rice were actually out there.'¹⁸⁷

For regular and occasional consumers who have suffered with health problems (cancer, food allergies or digestive problems) health features as a reason to begin eating organic food. In these cases the change of food habits and mind sets was more likely to be abrupt and take immediate effect and relate to specific dietary needs and changes.

'I think it stemmed from Ruth being ill really... Yeah that was a significant driver because we had the force to change habits.'¹⁸⁸

'It was mainly stomach problems, noticing that after lunch I often felt quite sick or bloated'¹⁸⁹

Although health is a major trigger in changing food habits, for most consumers the change appears to be gradual rather than jolting and involves a complex set of demands and aspirations for food which crystallises over time. The exception to this trend we have found is the regular consumer who was diagnosed with breast cancer. Often it is one influence such as health that begins the process and upon further consideration other factors such as environmental concerns and animal welfare become assimilated. Additional value based reasons which complement other reasons play a role in the re-description process which reinforces motivation.

'The health part was a factor but the environmental side is also equally as important. I think certain events push you on... It wasn't that I suddenly became overly health conscious but your life moves in a different mode and being pregnant I was ill.'¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Regular Organic Consumer E

¹⁸⁷ Regular Organic Consumer G

¹⁸⁸ Occasional Organic Consumer C

¹⁸⁹ Regular Organic Consumer E (2)

¹⁹⁰ Regular Organic Consumer B

As previously discussed real-world events such as pregnancy and having a baby, are also likely to have a relatively abrupt effect on food habits. The aspiration not to consume unhealthy food and to avoid toxins becomes more important. However, this does not generally prompt loyal organic food habits, but, inspires more general healthy eating practice.

‘Once you have a little tiny baby you really do not want to contaminate their body and you try harder.’¹⁹¹

Dissatisfaction with Organic Food

Even when experiences with organic food haven’t been completely satisfying, narratives suggest that the strong mind set of a regular consumer is not swayed. For example, some regular consumers will comment that organic vegetables and fruit go rotten quickly which puts them off buying organic fruit, so non organic alternatives are purchased instead. This experience is however not significant enough to be used as a reason to abandon preference for organic food. In fact it is sometimes provided as a reason to confirm the appealing characteristics of organic food – that the vegetables are natural and have no chemicals to keep them artificially fresh for a long time.

‘Organic vegetables especially from the farmers go off very quickly which just shows. I’ve bought non organic broccoli and it lasts for ages.’¹⁹²

This indicates that the decisions to buy organic food for the regular consumers are deep rooted in trust.

Trust orientated occasional consumers resemble regular consumers in their general conviction about organic food and often express a desire to consume more in the future.

Sceptical occasional consumers, however, convey a lack of trust about production methods and regulatory procedures as well as super-markets. The implication is that organic food may not differ substantially to conventional produce.

‘You don’t really know what is going on [with organic farmers and how the soil association checks them] you can never be absolutely sure. So I maintain a degree of scepticism.’¹⁹³

‘We are quite sceptical about some of it. We are not absolutely sure that it is fully organic, so we are a bit sceptical about the claims made’.¹⁹⁴

Lack of trust is in turn confirmed by experiences of poor quality organic food. Stories about dissatisfaction are cited to back up a decision to not buy organic food regularly.

‘The organic meat isn’t as lean. I have bought organic food and the taste is not as good as [non organic]. I have tried so organic food doesn’t necessarily mean better taste’¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Occasional Organic Consumer C

¹⁹² Regular Organic Consumer I

¹⁹³ Occasional Organic Consumer F

¹⁹⁴ Occasional Organic Consumer F (2)

¹⁹⁵ Occasional Organic Consumer F

‘Organic eggs don’t taste fantastic. I don’t know how those chickens have really lived because there is no real traceability. I’m very aware that supermarkets can kind of do anything and are probably pulling the wool over our eyes with this organic blast.’¹⁹⁶

Non consumers also convey similar scepticism about the realities of organic production and the consequence on food quality and taste. In some cases there is a degree of scepticism about organic food based on a combination of disappointing experiences and a lack of objective trustworthy information about production methods to hand. This is backed up with examples about inferior taste, unnecessary plastic packaging which takes away from the ‘organic’ image of the food and lack of trust for supermarkets.

3.3 Influencing others with respect to organic consumption

This section examines the narratives of regular consumers with particular reference to arguments used to influence others about organic food products. The interviewees were asked a direct question about if and how they would influence others about organic food.

Non-direct Influence

Many regular consumers felt uncomfortable with the idea of influencing people to buy organic food and narratives suggest most are unlikely to be actively influencing people because of the relatively higher cost of organic food.

‘I don’t try and impose my views but if people ask me in the queue or come to my house and pick things up I will tell them the farmers market is really good and tell them where it is. I would never impose my views and say you should buy organic, I know some people can’t afford to buy organic.’¹⁹⁷

It emerges that there is a common understanding amongst regular organic consumers in this study that because of the premium price it is a privilege to be able to afford to buy organic food.

‘I probably wouldn’t [influence others]. If they were interested in what we were doing I’d explain why we did it. But because there are financial implications with eating organic, I wouldn’t suggest they try organic food. I’m quite aware we’re financially in a fortunate situation in comparison to a lot of my friends and it would seem quite inappropriate to push organic that does come at quite a higher premium.’¹⁹⁸

Regular consumer have a tendency to not want to influence others to buy organic food apart from those who are very close, which stems from wanting to be sensitive to other people’s personal food habits and also to respect the choices people make.

‘I’m a great believer in Education not taking the choice away. So give people a choice...’¹⁹⁹

‘I just do what I want... I don’t pass judgement or ram it down peoples’ throats. I think the only person I have influenced is, well Phil, because we live together. And so that’s a huge thing.’²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Occasional Consumer A

¹⁹⁷ Regular Organic Consumer I

¹⁹⁸ Regular Organic Consumer B

¹⁹⁹ Regular Organic Consumer D

In one exceptional case the partner of the principal shopper has been significantly influenced and prior to the couple meeting the partner was a completely non organic food consumer. This secondary subject's narrative confirms that although he will still have a preference for old habits of certain non organic brands, his appreciation, enjoyment and practice of food has changed dramatically since meeting his partner.

'It was a learning experience, learning from Mayuri I trust her explicitly and I grew to understand why she wanted to shop in a particular way and for the reasons behind her purchasing decisions and I've come to take that into consideration quite a lot.'²⁰¹

Narratives of some regular consumers suggest that influence takes place gradually through a tangible introduction to organic food experiencing positive characteristics such as tastiness.

'My best friends were sceptics twelve years ago and then when they have come to stay for the weekend and they tried orange juice and they couldn't believe it. They started to experiment with organic things and now they do make choices...and my Dad does experiment more based on coming to my home and trying stuff and thinking that it tasted really nice. So the way I have influenced people is by doing that.'²⁰²

There are cases of regular organic consumers in our sample who consciously share what they have discovered about organic food with friends.

'Absolutely, we went to a party this week... our friends are also healthy eaters... it's a discussion point "oh I found this or have you tried couscous or have you tried this whatever, vegetable or something is new have you tried it?" So I think our friends are quite conscious I guess of food as well.'²⁰³

'I think most of my family already knew... my mum buys a lot more organic food than the rest of my family so she might have influenced them to buy more of it.'²⁰⁴

This kind of influencing can be viewed as part of everyday communication, a reinforcement of common identification with friends. Food is a social context can be viewed as a mediating material which can be utilised during social interaction.

Direct Influence

We have found one exceptional case in our sample of a dedicated regular organic consumer who is particularly committed to ethical consumerism and is not shy to spread the word about the benefits of the organic food.

'Sarah's mum I would say that we influence, they are a lot better than they used to be but they are still quite Tesco orientated people.'²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Regular Organic Consumer F

²⁰¹ Regular Organic Consumer F

²⁰² Regular Organic Consumer F

²⁰³ Regular Organic Consumer D (2)

²⁰⁴ Regular Organic Consumer I

²⁰⁵ Regular Organic Consumer E

'Every time we have a discussion Colin gives all the details and explains to them how much better it is.'²⁰⁶

This consumer's narrative shows passion for spreading the word about sustainable consumption and healthy eating, as well as a belief that through being a consumer everybody can contribute towards positive change, both for themselves and for the common good.

'I would say one of my latest recruits started as a junk food addict, he finished three years later knowing where his food came from, knowing how to eat it and knowing how to cook and being quite environmentally aware;; not brilliant, but a whole lot better. Alastair, who is my latest protégé doesn't realise that actually two months after he started working for me he is shopping more locally and he is now buying organic bananas rather than Tesco value bananas. The changes are subtle and he hasn't yet realised.'²⁰⁷

3.4 Conclusion: The Mind-sets of Regular Consumers of Organic Food as compared with Occasional and Non-consumers

This section has examined narratives from all three consumer groups exploring the differences in understandings about concepts of organic food and perspectives about rewards or benefits relating to organic food between and within the three different groups.

The majority of consumers in our sample have a limited knowledge and understanding of organic farming practices and even less about food processing conventions.

Regular consumers in our sample tend to have developed mind sets which trusts in various benefits of organic food gradually over a period of time. Consequently shopping habits have changed in line with the development of conviction from an assessment of rewards as well as in responses to practical based reasons such as increased availability.

As well as being familiar with the Soil Association as the main organic certification body, the majority of UK consumers share similar concepts about what organic food is. The common view is that organic production methods involve the use of less harmful pest control and fertilisation methods than conventional food production.

Despite this shared view about what organic means there are some distinct differences between regular consumers and the two other groups.

The majority of regular consumers tend to have dedicated more time into research about organic food and their concepts about organic food are more detailed than the other two groups.

Another clear difference is that 'sceptical' occasional and non organic consumers are more willing to question and doubt reasons why there are benefits for consuming organic food than regular consumers. They are also less likely to show conviction in relation to the benefits of organic production or commitment to practicing organic food habits (trust orientated occasional consumers).

²⁰⁶ Regular Organic Consumer E

²⁰⁷ Regular Organic Consumer E

These resistances to organic consumption include the trend to perceive organic products as misleading because they are less pure than they are marketed to be. Some occasional consumers are untrusting about whether there really are significant differences between organic and conventional produce and are sceptical of organic marketing practices because of corruption and profiteering associated with big business.

With regard to experience with organic food benefits are not believed to exist in relation to health and better taste is generally not perceived to be experienced or is not considered significant enough to be worth paying extra money for.

A distinct attribute of the mind set of regular consumers of organic food in comparison to others is the feature of value based reasons in the assessment of organic food and in particular the reasons which relate to 'Personal care'. In particular the perceived 'personal care' benefit of organic products relating to health. Regular consumers in our sample have developed a strong conviction for organic food and will not sway even when faced with experiences of product dissatisfaction.

Other value based reasons which relate to external care benefits such as environmental sustainability concerns and animal welfare are concepts that feature in the mind sets of consumers from all three organic groups. Regular and occasional consumers resemble each other in their evaluation of the importance of such external care values and their relevance with food consumption. However, occasional consumers in our sample are more likely to account other ethical ideals such as buying local produce because it is sustainable or buying fair trade because it benefits people. The mind sets of most non organic consumers do not feature strong conviction or commitment to such value based external care reasons. Dedicated organic consumers demonstrate most conviction and belief in their power as consumers to exercise their 'external care' beliefs through the practice of shopping.

Positive assessments of organic food from regular consumers relate to the trust they have in the general benefits of organic production. Trust in methods and practice of organic production and labelling provides an important foundation for the conviction that regular consumers have that buying organic food is worthwhile.

Difficulties with limited availability and concerns about the price of organic food were accounted by regular and occasional organic consumers. The most commonly accounted practical based reason which has contributed to a change in the assessment of organic and in the practice of organic food habits are those of increased availability and price. Increased availability was reported most by 'supermarket orientated' regular consumers. 'Alternatively orientated' regular and occasional consumers were more likely to report that while organic food availability has improved, limited availability still poses as an obstacle to more regular organic food consumption.

Increased availability of organic food is a concrete real world event which has functioned as a tipping point for a change in habits among the current regular organic consumers and some occasional consumers in this study.

Importantly a tipping point only functions to tip a balance when other established levers are in place. Consumers who have responded to the increased availability (the practical real world

event) have already carried out a positive assessment about organic food relating to a range of value based reasons and the associated 'personal care' and 'external care' benefits.

While most regular consumers in our sample are reserved about the practice of influencing others about the benefits of organic food, there are a number of dedicated organic consumers who have strong conviction about the benefits of organic food and will consciously try to influence others. Regular consumers, who claim to not wish to be too obvious in influencing others, conduct subtle forms of influence such as inviting people to taste organic food or speaking about it positively. In turn most consumers claim to have been influenced by other people themselves.

4. Habits with Respect to Organic Consumption

This chapter examines the range of products that regular and occasional organic food consumers' purchase, substitution strategies, loyalty and barriers to loyalty.

4.1 Buying Organic Foods

Generally organic food bought by regular and occasional consumers is unprocessed, fresh produce. Some cereals, bread, grains (such as rice), pasta, tinned beans and frozen peas are also bought. The most commonly consumed organic food product is milk. There are notable differences between regular organic consumers in terms of their organic food habits and this suggests that there is a spectrum of commitment to organic principles and habits.

Dedicated Regular Organic Consumers

A small subset of regular consumers have been found to have such a strong commitment to organic food that all or as much as is possible of the food they buy is organic, i.e. if there is an organic option they will buy it. For these consumers the product range may include meat/chicken/fish, vegetables and fruit, dairy products/eggs and cereals, tea, coffee and chocolate. This study has found that there are some regular consumers who do aim to buy as much of their food as they can as organic and they have been defined as dedicated regular consumers.

Dedicated regular organic consumers are likely to be health conscious, and politically aware basing most food related decisions on value-driven and emotional reasons rather than reasons of practicality such as convenience. Value driven reasons include environmental sustainability, animal welfare and business ethics. In support of commitment to environmental issues this group of consumers are also likely to mention that they buy ecologically friendly cleaning products and organic cosmetics.

'I tend to go for the Ecover brands for those because of their environmental record.'²⁰⁸

'[I go there if I want] that specific organic, beauty product or whatever it is, or I go to Neal's Yard and they are organically certified.'²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Regular organic consumer E

One characteristic of dedicated organic consumers is that they do not tend to follow a strict shopping routine with rigid pre-established patterns of food consumption. Rather, organic products bought vary from week to week and narratives of such consumers account that there is enjoyment derived from experimenting with new products. Dedicated consumers are open towards trying new organic products which forms part of the process of research which Gardner argues is an important element in the development of a mind set. In this context the present and continuous process of trying and testing products may be indicative of the relative recentness of organic food habits which are still developing. Additionally, such continuous experimentation is significant for the future demand of organic food and suggests dedicated organic consumers have a positive response to new products that arrive on the organic shopping arena.

‘Yeah I like experiencing, I like experimenting’²¹⁰

‘Oh completely I would say, yeah. I am completely open to trying new products.’²¹¹

Dedicated organic consumers tend to be alternatively orientated in their shopping locations and use a wide variety of small specialist organic and health food shops. This may include shops which are visited frequently as well as other shops visited on a spontaneous or ad hoc basis. There is one exception of a dedicated organic consumer who is generally supermarket orientated and the narrative suggests that this consumer also enjoys shopping spontaneously and opportunistically to experience less mainstream organic products.

‘If I am up in Soho I go to Fresh and Wild and explore because they have new things there as well and I just have a look to see if there is anything new worth trying. I like just having a look at the other bits and pieces they have, the food and any new snack type things. I just find new things in there.’²¹²

Even though this consumer is super-market orientated, the choice of supermarkets frequented reflects research invested into establishing knowledge about supermarket’s business ethics. Large multi-national supermarkets such as Tesco are rejected and the stores selected are up-market stores with positive ethical reputations.

As has already been discussed, dedicated regular consumers generally appear to strive to shop ethically, and this is viewed as a way of practicing a set of political and philosophical values. Sustainable consumption can be viewed as a way that some consumers practice ecological and social citizenship.

‘I’ve always believed in voting with your shopping basket.’²¹³

This may include the purchasing of fair-trade food products as well as other fair trade goods. This consumer, for example, had recently purchased a fair trade football for her son as an example of her commitment to sustainable, ethical consumption.

As well as a primary concern for food ethics and various ‘external care’ concerns, dedicated organic consumers convey that a degree of pleasure is derived from the shopping activity.

²⁰⁹ Regular organic consumer F

²¹⁰ Regular Organic Consumer F

²¹¹ Regular Organic Consumer E

²¹² Regular Organic Consumer F

²¹³ Regular Organic Consumer I

Pleasure is associated with the sensory experience of food such as taste and enjoyment and pleasure is gained from a sense of pride for practicing mindful ethical shopping. As Mary Douglas suggests 'goods make physical, visible statements about the hierarchy of values to which their chooser subscribes'²¹⁴

This group of dedicated regular organic consumers are likely to receive an above average income and to be unconcerned about cost issues. There is one exception to this high income trend, a dedicated regular consumer who has a limited food budget but believes so strongly in the personal and external care benefits derived from organic consumption she strives incredibly hard to fulfil her aspirations despite limited resources.

Regular Organic Consumers

The regular consumers in our sample are not exclusively organic and speak about selecting what are perceived to be the most important organic food items which they consider worth paying the extra price for.

'It depends on the item and, you know, the organic farming practices have been really different for some things... I would be happy to pay a premium for but for certain things you feel really ripped off.'²¹⁵

For some regular consumers' it is staples like milk, yoghurt, eggs and vegetables that come high up on the priority list. Reasons given relate to differences between conventional and organic farming practices and an understanding for example that conventional root vegetables are grown with more potentially hazardous chemicals than the organic variants. There is a belief that such chemicals may be absorbed into the food chain and consequently eaten.

'With organic vegetables you're not going to have chemical residues.'²¹⁶

Concern about dairy products relates to treatments in animal feed, such as hormones, that may get into the food chain. Other regular consumers' favour organic meat and dairy products while consuming conventional rather than organic vegetables. Reasons given for this selectivity relate to the cost of organic vegetables and the relative convenience of buying conventional produce. One regular consumer who previously bought organic vegetables recently cancelled an organic vegetable box scheme and reverted back to consuming conventional vegetables.

'We used to do [organic] fruits and vegetable as well but we cut back on that.. Because we have an excellent fruit and vegetable shop down the road, which is non organic and the prices are far better and it's quite easy, very convenient and it's just as good.'²¹⁷

Price is an important deciding factor in relation to buying organic vegetables (either all vegetables or select varieties) partly because there is an assessment from a food safety perspective that it is not very important for vegetables to be organic. Additionally, reference is made to acknowledge that specific crops which only require minimal pesticide control will not differ substantially if they are conventional or organic, neither in terms of personal health nor for the environment.

²¹⁴ Page ix (preface) Douglas, M and Isherwood, B (1996) *The World of Goods*: Routledge.

²¹⁵ Regular Organic Consumer B

²¹⁶ Regular Organic Consumer G

²¹⁷ Regular Organic Consumer D

In contrast to the assessment about vegetables, regular consumers who consume meat tend to buy organic poultry/meat and this priority relates to issues of traceability, safety and health.

'I won't eat meat unless I know that it's pretty much organic or from a good supplier.'²¹⁸

Animal welfare issues and ethics also feature as value based reasons for the consumption of animal products. There is a common assessment that organic standards include a positive animal welfare benefit.

'Taking milk as an example, I'd read a lot about the condition of a lot of dairy herds; they are forced to produce gallons and gallons of milk year in year out. With organic milk at least you have a bit more of a guarantee that the welfare of the herd is better '²¹⁹

As has been previously mentioned in section one, many regular organic consumers in our sample receive an organic box delivery. For many of these consumers this is the only organic food they consume and their other food is non organic. There is altogether a more relaxed approach to organic consumption and loyalty to organic is not always as the forefront of regular consumer's minds.

'Eggs, I look to get organic. Bread, if there is an organic option we get it, but we don't worry about that too much, and vegetables for making my baby's food we try and always get organic but not always so it's not purist at all.'²²⁰

Occasional organic consumers

The occasional consumers in our sample tend to buy one organic item such as organic milk, eggs or meat on an occasional basis either from the supermarket or from the same supplier each time.

'The meat I buy from the farmers market, I know the supplier and I can trust the meat and I think it is organic.'²²¹

The viewed benefits for consuming such items are trust of the supplier for quality and issues of food safety. The tendency is for occasional consumers to buy an organic product for a specific reason or via a direct sale where trust is gained in relation to the product or from the context. Trust is not extended to organic food in general. Loyalty is practiced in specific exchanges and does not apply generally to organic food. Some 'super-market orientated' occasional consumers have a similar trust for organic food as regular consumers and believe in 'external care' and 'personal care' benefits. However, the degree of commitment to organic food production is expressed through these irregular and infrequent purchasing patterns. This group of consumers do not appear to invest substantial time or effort into consuming organically.

'Supermarket orientated' occasional consumers respond to the real world event of organic food availability in the supermarket and although they express aspirations to consume more organic products the barrier of availability stops them. 'Alternatively orientated' occasional consumers in the sample who shop at small shops and farmers' markets will buy local produce direct from

²¹⁸ Regular Organic Consumer E

²¹⁹ Regular Organic Consumer G

²²⁰ Regular Organic Consumer B

²²¹ Occasional Organic Consumer A

producers and appear unconcerned about whether local good are organic or not. The major concern is feeling reassured about the source of the food being purchased.

‘Yes I think it gives you a sense of security. If you talk to the producer I think it makes you feel they can’t lie to you about the food. It might not be true but I feel I know what I’m getting. They will say it’s local but not organic.’²²²

4.2 Substitution Strategies

Substitution strategies refer to incidences when a consumer isn’t able to buy a desired organic product; for example when a shop has sold out and how this is practically responded to.

Dedicated Regular Organic Consumers

As previously suggested, there appears to be a spectrum of organic commitment evident amongst consumers. Dedicated regular organic consumers appear to be most willing to relocate to find the organic item they desire and explicitly show their high level of organic commitment. The pressures of contemporary life are worked around and there is a perseverance to seek out organic food despite time constraints, geographical inconveniences and other obstacles.

Dedicated regular consumers in our sample whose accounts show they will make a concerted effort to relocate to buy the organic item they want. Some dedicated consumers speak about their determination to find particular organic products which they feel so strongly about being organic that they will invest time into shopping around to find the product. Treason for non organic is a last resort.

‘If I can’t find the organic vegetables, I will drive to Tesco to find it as I really don’t want to buy non organic potatoes...I have wanted my son to have broccoli and haven’t been able to find organic in any of the shops and will be forced to buy non organic and I haven’t liked doing it and have soaked it but would rather he had his vegetable than nothing.’²²³

Even if the task is inconvenient this strategy of re-locating to find the organic item is generally accepted as a necessity by the consumer and carried out quite willingly.

‘If the supermarket has run out of organic string beans then I go down to Marks and Spencer’s...That’s what I do...it bothers me and so I will trot off and try and find it somewhere else.’²²⁴

Dedicated consumers’ demonstration of determination to consume organic food indicates that even degrees of discomfort will be tolerated to buy a desired organic product and there are no real signs of resistance to such inconvenience.

‘I have gone elsewhere. I have to. I would scoot off to the next healthy shop in the area. That happened about three weeks ago...Wellbeing in the Standard didn’t have it so I went down to one in Greenwich, which was a pain in the backside because it was raining’²²⁵

²²² Occasional Organic Consumer D

²²³ Regular Organic Consumer I

²²⁴ Regular Organic Consumer F

²²⁵ Regular Organic Consumer E

Evidence from narrative accounts also suggests that there is a tendency for dedicated organic consumers to substitute one kind of organic product that is unavailable for another organic item (close substitution) rather than employing treason and resorting to buying a non organic variant.

'I'll probably buy a different kind of fruit. The farmers market have strawberries that aren't organic but they are not as sprayed but I would much a rather have something that is organic.' ²²⁶

The constraints that present themselves in real life scenarios do however occasionally affect even the most dedicated organic consumers and there are accounts of instances as well as video footage where non organic items are bought due to necessity. In one shopping trip the consumer is at his local, greengrocer and has asked if they have organic bananas. Upon learning the shop has just sold out he settles to buy the non organic variety.

Regular Organic Consumers

Most regular consumers in contrast to dedicated consumers appear relatively relaxed about an incident when they can't get an organic product they planned to buy and will substitute the product for a non organic variety, employing treason. The product most discussed in this context is milk and regular consumers who normally buy organic milk will buy a conventional variety if the organic has sold out or they have run out of their usual supply and need to top up. This is demonstrated in narratives as well as during shopping trips. Narratives suggest that in most cases convenience drives the strategy.

'I guess it really depends how much you want it. If I wanted some milk I'd just get any milk until I could go shopping again and get what I wanted. We'd get what we need and wouldn't bother going to another shop.'²²⁷

Video evidence from a filmed shopping trip with one regular organic consumer in our sample observed a similar relaxed attitude. The consumer did not notice the organic milk and without looking too hard went directly for the conventional milk and put that in the trolley. There was no obvious bother experienced by this and the strategy was pragmatic and hassle-free. Generally the response to a situation where organic is unavailable is one of resignation to having to make do with what is available. In some cases this may be an alternative organic product or a non organic product variant.

This resignation to employ treason is a common feature of regular consumers shopping and is observed in shopping trips as well as narrative reports. In particular where a shop has a limited range of organic products, non organic items are purchased quite routinely by regular consumers. Practical constraints such as time, cost and convenience account for the substitution strategies regular consumers employ while shopping.

4.3 Loyalty towards organic food and barriers to loyalty

Loyalty

Loyalty for organic food stems from a relationship between 'external care' and 'personal care' values, and beliefs about how or whether organic food can be trusted to deliver the corresponding

²²⁶ Regular Organic Consumer I

²²⁷ Regular Organic Consumer B

benefits. Trust, therefore, underpins consumer loyalty for organic food. When a link is perceived between production methods, care benefits and practical reasons, appreciation and support are expressed through loyal organic shopping habits. One way that trust is formed is through the acquisition of knowledge through a process of combining interest with research. The more time invested in researching and investigating about organic food, the more likely it is that meanings are derived and loyalty arises.

In relation to organic food, narratives concerning loyalty suggest that there are a small number of dedicated organic food consumers who are loyal to buying as much organic food as they can.

This group of consumers will engineer their shopping to maximise the possibility of being able to purchase organic food products. Loyal in this context is defined in terms of being loyal to the concept of organic food and firmly believing in a commitment to supporting this mode of production. There is also loyalty to shopping in specific locations, in some cases includes a desire consumers have to support small businesses while buying the organic products they want. Local farmers' markets and small specialist shops are the preferred shopping locations. There is only one dedicated consumer who is 'supermarket orientated' and this consumer chooses up-market supermarkets such as Waitrose and Marks and Spencer where there is an extensive range of organic goods. Dedicated regular consumers are most likely to have adopted a firmly consolidated mind set about their organic commitment. This mind set includes logical reasons, research, resonance, re-descriptions and real world events; even when faced with resistance (such as inconvenience, expense, dissatisfaction) the mind set remains solidly unchanged.

Regular organic consumers are not fully committed to being completely organic in their food habits and speak about loyalty to particular organic goods such as dairy products for specific reasons; such as health. This comes out strong in a narrative from a regular consumer who has suffered from cancer.

'I do definitely believe in buying my fats and dairy organic. I am very loyal to the fact that if I am going to have it it's going to be organic, it's going to be as pure as possible.'²²⁸

In this case the narrative is from a regular consumer who is loyal to certain organic food for specific reasons of health; organic habits were adopted in response to suffering from breast cancer. In this case health and disease prevention has been assessed, and research has reinforced the belief that organic dairy products are safer. Real world events such as increased availability have made this preference for organic food more possible and resources such as time and money are available and facilitate this preference. Rewards include peace of mind and a sense of control and security over health concerns. Resistance can be seen in the unwillingness to extend this loyalty to other organic products. However this resistance relates directly to practical reasons - namely that of price.

There are regular organic consumers who are loyal to a particular organic product which they always buy as organic. Often this type of one-off organic product loyalty relates to perceptions about personal care benefits such as superior taste and quality.

'It'll be organic peanut butter or it'll be items of organic things that just tasted better and I was willing to spend more money on'²²⁹

²²⁸ Regular Organic Consumer A

²²⁹ Regular Organic Consumer D (2)

Loyalty to an organic product in this context is selective and is tied up with consumer satisfaction and sensory pleasure. Reference to a broader commitment to organic food because of a range of personal and external care rewards is explored during a latter part of the narrative when reflections are made about the benefits of the organic mode of production.

'I think when you look at organic above and beyond buying into the 'it's healthier' and it's the best way to be and the best way to go. There's also saying I'm supporting this way of providing food and farming a land, so I think that's important from that point of view and you're not just encouraging people to stick loads of chickens in a box and feed them.'²³⁰

Occasional organic consumers also show loyalty to certain organic products for specific personal care rewards such as safety and quality. For example the consumers who always buy organic milk because they believe that by doing so they are minimising health risks. The loyal practice of buying organic milk is directly related to the practical factor of price.

'One of the things is the price differential is not so great first of all...and the quality and the taste of the milk'²³¹

Generally most regular and occasional organic consumers' who have established a routine purchasing habit of an available organic product they are satisfied with in terms of taste and quality, will continue to frequently purchase that product. Consumers do not tend to change their habits unless they are confronted with a context where a product is unavailable. Unavailability is observed as a barrier by occasional organic consumers who aspire to consume more organic products but who do not persevere against the constraints of contemporary life. There is an almost apologetic tone because they are defeated by real life events such as lack of availability.

'I will try to buy more and more organic, but only because there's more and more available, because availability is still the issue.'²³²

Regular and dedicated consumers show more loyalty to organic food because they are willing to dedicate more time, research and resources into sourcing organic food.

Barriers to Loyalty

Most regular, occasional and non consumers of organic food suggest in their narratives a preference for organic food production; when food is believed to be produced in a way that is natural (and therefore healthy) and sustainable; it simply makes sense. This concept resonates as a good idea for all consumers but is subject to certain resistance which are barriers to the consumption of organic food in certain scenarios. Believing in the ideal of organic food does not necessarily lead to full commitment to purchasing organic food. Trust for the organic mode of production is bound up with how benefits and barriers are perceived by consumers. High levels of trust in organic food will affect the way that barriers are managed and perhaps overcome or transcended by dedicated regular consumers.

Shopping locations / Availability

²³⁰ Regular Organic Consumer A

²³¹ Occasional Organic Consumer F

²³² Occasional Organic Consumer B

‘Alternatively orientated’ regular and occasional consumers do not trust organic food that is sold in supermarkets –this is not the kind of organic food they want, they are sceptical about the production and accuracy of the labelling.

‘There are a lot of companies now which have jumped on the organic stuff using the organic label to try to get a little more money.’²³³

‘I wouldn’t want to buy organic from Tesco that’s not what organic would mean for me’.²³⁴

For consumers who aspire to avoid supermarkets, organic food sourcing requires more time and effort which can be a barrier to consumption in cases where availability and time are issues. However, dedicated consumers who are rigorous in their organic habits tend to transcend this barrier by investing time and energy into sourcing organic products from various locations.

Occasional and regular consumers who are constrained by time and experience this constraint as a barrier to organic consumption are those who tend to choose to shop at the most convenient locations, often supermarkets in close proximity to their homes. Lack of availability of the authentic organic products they desire (products which possess traceability and ‘an information system that provides a guarantee that the food is actually what it is’²³⁵) is often cited as a reason that more organic products are not purchased.

‘The problem is the opportunity for me to purchase that food’²³⁶

Regular and occasional consumers are less willing to invest extra resources and dedication into sourcing organic food. Dedication, however, revolves around the level of trust a consumer has in the true ‘personal care’ and ‘external care’ benefits of organic food.

Processed Organic food

Preference for basic raw organic ingredients rather than processed organic food is articulated by all consumers. Authenticity fits in with the concept about the organic method of production being unadulterated and natural. Rejection of organic from Tesco can be viewed as part of this desire to consume food that is trusted. An organic label is not always enough to persuade a consumer to purchase an organic product, especially in the light of processed organic food. A feeling about and connection with the food based on the context where it is sold can provide the desired reassurance to influence a purchase.

The development of processed organic food products by supermarkets has roused some suspicion amongst consumers who require verification that organic food can be trusted.

‘I don’t think that because it has a label that says organic it doesn’t necessarily mean it will be better. You have a Sainsbury marketeer who has marketed something as organic and actually you look at the back of the packet and it’s stuffed full of things that aren’t good for you, they are pulling the wool over your eyes and you think hey this is organic it has to be good for you, well it’s not.’²³⁷

Generally processed organic food does not feature in the accounts of shopping habits from consumers in this study. Lack of trust in this context is a barrier to organic consumption.

²³³ Regular Organic Consumer D

²³⁴ Regular Organic Consumer B

²³⁵ Occasional Organic Consumer F

²³⁶ Occasional Organic Consumer F

²³⁷ Occasional Organic Consumer A

However, it is important to remember that we have selected food engaged consumers and we did not expect them to purchase processed food.

Support for British agriculture/Local produce

The concept about buying local and supporting British agriculture comes up a lot in the narratives from people in all consumer groups. Often there is a preference for local produce for reasons such as; it is more trustworthy or because it has not had to travel far (and therefore is viewed as more sustainable). The reason this is a barrier to buying organic food is that a lot of local produce is not certified organic.

‘Support British agriculture... the more I can buy their products the more likely they are going to continue growing that stuff and more likely that British agriculture will become organic because that’s the nature of Britain at the moment. And I suppose I feel closer to it if I know it’s been grown in Dorset or Devon I actually think its close enough to home... maybe I’ll got more faith in the food produced at home than I have away.’²³⁸

Often the feelings associated with local produce are not altogether rational. There is a nuance that consuming locally feels right and indicates identification with being British, a sense of national pride, as well as a sense of connection and trust linked to proximity of production. In relation to trust derived from local production there is also suggestion in the narratives of regular consumers that lack of trust for imported organic produce is linked to a loyalty for local or British produce.

‘The labelling and different standards in different countries...I do wonder how it is monitored abroad, for example you can get organic apples but they are absolutely perfect and I do wonder sometimes.’²³⁹

The suspicion articulated about the perfect organic produce from countries where the regulations are little known about, involves a lack of trust that in fact such products may not be authentically ‘organic’.

Price

Price is probably the most significant barrier to buying organic food. Regular, occasional and non consumers all speak about price as a barrier to buying organic food.

‘Budget is the major factor in whether or not to buy organic food’²⁴⁰

For consumers from all groups with the exception of dedicated organic consumers there is a notion that profiteering in the industry is unjustified and that organic food should be priced more competitively.

‘Again it comes down to money. I think that someone is making money from it especially now that the big supermarket are so heavily involved...I really don’t want to buy into that...’²⁴¹

‘If they could bring the price down of organic food I think it would be a really good thing.’²⁴²

²³⁸ Regular Organic Consumer D

²³⁹ Regular Organic Consumer I

²⁴⁰ Non Organic Consumer A

²⁴¹ Non Organic Consumer C

²⁴² Non Organic Consumer B

With the exception of dedicated consumers, most regular consumers select to buy certain organic products (the items they deem the most important) and to compensate for the higher prices paid for the organic produce, the remainder of food sourced is non organic.

'The cost of vegetables and fruit...it's difficult to sustain buying lots...we go one way with [non organic] vegetables and fruit and the other way with [organic] meat and stuff.'²⁴³

Regular consumers buy selective organic products because they have different mind sets for different types of organic food relating to their perceptions about rewards and benefits. With the exception of dedicated regular consumers who are less cost-sensitive, generally, regular consumers are very mindful in their management of their food budget and have buying strategies to minimise the cost they pay for organic food. The 'over packaged organic food like the deluxe organic biscuits' often do not fit into the regular organic consumer mind set because they are fancy, over priced and heavily processed missing the point about what 'organic' is really about. However, other raw organic ingredients are considered worthy of a price premium.

'For a pint of organic milk I'm happy to pay the premium. At 'Better-Food' you can buy sacks of muesli and rice and then cost feels fine so when you work it out per sack the premium isn't so high.'²⁴⁴

For occasional organic consumers price is articulated as an explicit barrier to consuming more organic food for there is a notion that organic food shouldn't be excessively more expensive than conventional produce.

'If I had good prices I would probably consume organic food more frequently than I do.'²⁴⁵

4.4 Conclusion: The habits of dedicated and regular consumers of organic food as compared with occasional and non-consumers

There are a small group of dedicated regular consumers who endeavour to buy as close to 100% organic food products as they can, as well as regularly purchasing ecological detergents and organic cosmetics. This group of dedicated consumers target specific specialist outlets to satisfy their desires for an extensive range of organic products and we have found are particularly open to experimentation with new products. We have also found that dedicated organic consumers are often willing to relocate to another shopping location to find a specific organic product and generally only employ treason as a substitution strategy as a last resort. Dedicated regular consumers employ loyalty strategies by choosing to shop in the specialist locations where an extensive range of organic goods are stocked. This group of consumers tend to buy a variety of different organic food products on a regular basis. They are active in the process of research and seek information from labels, specialist publications and speak frequently with shop keepers. Dedicated consumers are also likely to articulate strong external value based reasons such as ethics, sustainability and environmental concern for their commitment to buying organic food. The majority of dedicated consumers have abhorrence for multi-national supermarkets such as Tesco and by principle reject these as viable shopping locations. There is also a rejection of conventional food as untrustworthy which contributes to the positioning of organic food as an

²⁴³ Regular Organic Consumer D

²⁴⁴ Regular Organic Consumer B

²⁴⁵ Occasional Organic Consumer F

acceptable and favourable alternative. This group of consumers tend to allocate a large budget for food and some dedicated consumers even comment that the cost of most food is artificially low and that consumers ought to pay the real cost of food production.

The majority of regular organic consumers in contrast to the dedicated consumers are selective in their organic consumption i.e. they tend to buy organic food from specific product categories such as dairy products and meat while buying conventional food for other product categories such as bread and certain vegetables. Therefore a ranking of what is important to buy as organic exists for regular consumers. In similarity to dedicated regular consumers we have found that some regular consumers are untrusting of multi national supermarkets such as Tesco. There is suspicion for the authenticity of organic products in what is perceived to be an unethical, ultra profit-driven domain. We have also found that regular consumers are sensitive to the price premiums that exist for certain organic goods and that price is a significant barrier to broader organic consumption. We also suggest that regular consumers' level of loyalty can be viewed in light of the demonstration they make through the kind of shops or locations they choose to shop at. For example 'supermarket orientated' regular consumers tend not to seek out specialist shops and generally shop in supermarkets which are convenient and where a moderate range of organic products will be available. This in itself will limit their organic shopping choices. This also indicates that there is scope for the development of organic ranges in such local supermarkets. Additionally the level of determination and perseverance to consume organic food is lower than that communicated by dedicated consumers who illustrate willingness to relocate. Regular consumers are more likely to experience the constraints of contemporary life as factors that pose an obstacle to more extensive organic purchasing.

Products which rank highly on the organic list for regular consumers are dairy products such as milk and yoghurt. For such products the premium price is viewed as marginal and they are generally considered worth paying extra for due to perceived rewards such as health benefits and safety from possible pesticides. Benefits in relation to taste are also found to be significant for regular consumers and taste is also central in the development of loyalty for an organic food product. Dedicated regular consumers communicate most positive conviction about the superior taste of organic food and are most loyal and rigorous in their organic consumption habits amongst the groups of consumers. However, most regular consumers in our sample were found to be relaxed about their loyalty towards organic products and were willing to substitute organic milk for conventional milk when the former was unavailable. Treason in these instances was directly related to issues of convenience and lack of inclination to relocate.

Occasional consumers generally do not have loyal organic habits, however, some 'supermarket orientated' occasional consumers tend to be loyal to a specific organic product such as milk or eggs which they try to always buy as organic. They do not specifically choose shopping locations to maximise organic availability and treason is often employed as a substitution strategy. Yet, some occasional consumers articulate aspirations to consume more organic food and report lack of availability as a real barrier. Choice of shopping locations tends to be based on issues of convenience for 'supermarket orientated' occasional consumers. This clearly points out there is scope for the development of products for the supermarket organic ranges, especially in terms of wider and more abundant availability. In similarity with regular consumers, safety, taste and price feature as important factors for feelings of satisfaction about organic food products.

'Alternatively orientated' occasional consumers in contrast tend to be less loyal to buying organic food, have less routine purchasing habits and are more guided by the context of shopping in farmers' markets where stock, availability and prices change regularly. This subset of occasional

consumers report less dissatisfaction with lack of organic availability and appear quite content in their shopping habits whether they manage to buy organic food products or not. For this group of consumers there is little loyalty to support the principles of organic because there is lack of trust for organic production and the organic label.

Other barriers to loyalty relate strongly to trust, we have found that consumers articulate that if they are paying a premium for a product that they like to believe they are consuming something with an added value. This added value could take many forms such as quality, taste, peace of mind (safety), ethical or environmental value, as well as the enjoyment of the shopping experience.

The barrier of price is a concern across all organic consumers groups with the exception of dedicated consumers. The higher price for organic food is a barrier for regular consumers who aspire to consume more organic food products. Many comment that they expect prices to fall which will make a wider variety of products available to them. Occasional consumers and non consumers comment on the high price of organic food in the context of lack of trust. High prices are seen as indicating profiteering in the industry which reinforces an existing lack of trust for the authenticity of organic food.

We have found that across all consumer groups a significant barrier to loyalty that emerges is one related to one aspect of dissatisfaction with organic produce. Imported organic produce are viewed as environmentally unsustainable because they have been air freighted into the UK and have incurred a high number of food miles. In response to this dissatisfaction consumers often will employ treason and buy locally produced food that isn't organic. Dedicated organic consumers indicate that the preferred choice is food that is both organic and locally produced.

Some occasional and non consumers of organic food share similar doubts with regular consumers about the virtues of organic food in relation to food miles and environmental sustainability. This factor reinforces the scepticism occasional consumers have about the rewards associated with organic produce. Support and loyalty for local produce is seen as a positive alternative to organic because it is trusted to deliver greater 'external care' benefits.

5. The Role of Particular Events and Persons in the Development of Organic Consumption Patterns

5.1 The influences of lifecycle events, family members and friends

Most regular consumers in our sample suggest that the development of their organic food habits stem from their own evaluation of 'personal' and 'external care' benefits, value-based reasons and practical reasons as well. Developing what has been briefly discussed in section, *2.4 Influences on Changing Food Habits*, this section will specifically examine the experience of certain lifecycle events, food scandals and media events, as well as how friends and family have had influence on the development of *organic* food consumption patterns for consumers of organic food.

Lifecycle Events

The lifecycle events that regular consumers recount as having had an impact on their current food habits include the transition into adulthood, a rise in income, pregnancy, the birth of a child and the experience of illness.

As examined in section two, the transition into adulthood appears to influence consumers' food habits, often reinforcing conviction with regard to organic food consumption. It is at this stage that a deeper sense of responsibility is practiced maybe through becoming a property owner, getting married or beginning a family and more care is taken in everyday lifestyle decisions. This transition to adulthood importantly involves a change in available financial resources which allows consumers at this stage to access organic products they felt were previously out of financial reach. Therefore this lifecycle change can be seen as a tipping point in the change of mind process. Foundations about the decision that organic food is preferable will already be in place, but a greater degree of financial resources at this stage brings about subtle changes in the practice of shopping which form the beginning of regular patterns.

According to our consumer narratives, the lifecycle change which has the most acute impact on food consumption patterns is that of pregnancy and the birth of a baby.

'It was half hearted organic shopping until I had my first daughter. It was when I became pregnant with my first that we realised we had to start being a bit extra careful what you expose yourself to. I think it was that that pushed us to that next stage.'²⁴⁶

For this young couple with children under five who are regular consumers, the experience of pregnancy consolidates and strengthens motivations to buy organic food. Again the arrival of children in the household can be viewed as another tipping point towards more regular and broader organic purchasing habits.

Experiences of exceptional sensitivity are accounted during pregnancy by regular and occasional consumers alike. This includes an aspiration to consume only the purest possible food and to protect the unborn baby from potential future harm. A renewed sense of adult responsibility is triggered by a first hand experience of the baby's vulnerability at birth, and a hyper awareness about the important role that food plays in health and well being develops.

Sourcing organic baby food is verified by shopping trip video footage of young parents who strive to always feed their children organic food, even if they themselves do not always eat organically.

'When it's a new baby that's so pure and unspoilt you want to make sure it stays that way and not do anything that will cause any damage in the future'²⁴⁷

The underpinning motivation for such a change in food habits is that of health. In other cases of regular consumers with children however, pregnancy and the arrival of a baby did not spur on the increased consumption of organic products partly because these habits had already been established. Health consciousness relating to diet had already been accommodated within their habits. Organic habits influenced by a childhood experience of healthy eating and alternative philosophy have been consolidated during the transition into adulthood.

²⁴⁶ Regular Organic Consumer B

²⁴⁷ Regular Organic Consumer B

The experience of pregnancy and the arrival of children can be seen as levers for a change of mind and habits. However, for such life cycle events to have had significant impact, consumers tend to have some existing orientation towards healthy eating.

The same can be said for the event of illness. One regular organic consumer with children did not substantially change food habits during pregnancy or the arrival of babies, but developed organic food habits with the diagnosis of a serious illness. To some extent the change in food habits towards certain organic foods was a response to suffering from breast cancer. The event of illness triggered the consumer to conduct research and to seek information relating to diet. Serious illness brings about a radical re-assessment of many aspects of life, and food is one facet which is often re-examined under rigorous scrutiny. In itself, illness is not a direct reason for a change in food habits, but one factor within a context where there is already some orientation towards healthy eating. For example, in the context of the consumer who has suffered with breast cancer, the consumer comes from a family where organic food is consumed regularly and where childhood food was always healthy and nutritional. Family influences in conjunction with the experience of illness that brought about a gradual change in mind and habits towards regular organic consumption.

The event of illness whether it is diet related or not, has been found to trigger a profound sense of health consciousness where attention to consuming a healthy diet has been at the forefront of a more general change in lifestyle.

Family Members and Friends

With regard to the influence of people on the development on organic food habits, evidence from our narratives suggests that the influence from friends plays a considerable role in the introduction to organic food for some consumers and for others in reinforcing some existent organic orientation and conviction. Many of these accounts include examples where friends and colleagues have highlighted specific benefits and worthy reasons in favour of consuming organically. Much influence is experienced within the context of professional work where there is a connection to matters of health, sustainability or the environment. Therefore, often the reasons to consume organic food cited by friends and members of reference groups tend to relate to positive external rewards such as environmental sustainability. Influence from other people in this context operates by reinforcement of pre-existing values and relates to the process of research and information gathering. Accessing an environment where ideas can be explored and forums for discussion can take place, appears to be important for exchanging knowledge as well as researching and information seeking. Influence may relate to the identifications people forge with colleagues and dialogues about food may strengthen bonds.

In terms of notions of belonging and identifications, the common food habits that couples have, indicates how influence develops within partnerships. One of the strongest and most verifiable influences featured in the narratives comes from the narrative of the recent spouse of a dedicated organic consumer. This secondary household member (i.e. he is not the principal shopper in the household) only recently (since cohabitation) adopted the organic purchasing habits of his dedicated organic partner and was previously a non organic consumer.

'It was all learning for me, it was a learning experience, and I obviously I trust her explicitly and I grew to understand why she wanted to shop in a particular way and for the reasons behind her purchasing decisions and I've come to take that on board.'²⁴⁸

Through the experience of shopping as a common project and the associated discussions about food, he recounts a change in mind set as well as habits.

In other interviews with secondary subjects of regular consumers of organic food, there are a number of partners who explain that they do not absolutely share the principal shopper's belief in and commitment to organic food. They do not dramatically contest the consumption of organic food but are clear to point out that the decision to buy organic food has not come from them. However, as narratives progresses there are suggestions that secondary consumers are becoming increasingly active in sourcing organic food themselves. When prompted to talk about reasons for organic consumption there were moments of re-description, where organic food can be identified with healthy food which is already a mind set for certain consumption. Perhaps this group represents a potential growth area in the market patterns of the organic consumer.

Influence in specific relation to organic consumption from extended family is less common or at least less articulated by respondents. However, the role of the family appears to have been significant in the development of both food mindsets and habits.

For one small subset of regular consumers parental influence during childhood is recounted as having had an impact on current interest in healthy eating and parents are mentioned as having a strong orientation towards healthy eating.

However, half of our group of regular consumers recount their childhood food as either distinctively unhealthy or not especially healthy and have therefore developed their own set of healthy food preferences in adulthood from influences outside the family. In these cases negative associations with childhood unhealthy food has been an indirect influence to forge better habits in adulthood.

Additionally, the majority of regular consumers in our sample do not have family members who also currently consume organic food or who consumed organic food before they did. In some cases the influence is in reverse, where the regular consumer influences their parents to try organic produce.

Regular consumers comment that their parents think organic food is over priced, others have parents who remain in consumption habits they had before organic food became widely available and have not changed to date. Even where parents are referred to as having influenced consumers to eat healthily, the practice of healthy eating does involve organic consumption, but more usually a balanced and varied diet including lots of vegetables and fruit.

There is however a small subgroup of consumers whose organic orientation has been influenced by parents for reasons of health and food safety.

'Yeah, my parents certainly buy a lot of organic food, there's only two of them...My Dad sometimes rings up and says "Don't eat pork!," or "Unless it's organic don't eat this" or "Don't eat that" ...He is fairly up to date...But he tries to stay abreast of what's happening in the organic world and he likes to know what's what and he reads the paper a lot.'²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Regular Organic Consumer F (2)

²⁴⁹ Regular Organic Consumer A

There is also evidence of parental influence to the younger generation. A secondary interview with a 16 year son of a regular consumer articulates how he has been influenced by his mother's commitment to organic food.

'She's always told me that organic foods are healthier for you and will have a positive effect on you and your body'²⁵⁰

This strong influence has been deliberate and has included cookery lessons at a restaurant where only organic ingredients are used.

Occasional consumers also recount having been influenced by family members. There is the case of an empty nesting couple who refer to their daughter as a central source of knowledge and information regarding the benefits of organic food.

'We have also started to buy organic carrots because our daughter told us that it's much better for us'²⁵¹

Another occasional consumer conveys in his narrative that he has been influenced by his sister who is a yoga instructor deeply influenced by alternative food philosophy, vegetarianism and consumes organic food for personal health reasons as well as the ecological well being of the planet. The consumer is however only an occasional user partly because of barriers he experiences such as availability and price, but there is also an implication that he is not as convinced as his sister that organic really is better.

There is a non organic consumer who recounts that his parents and siblings are regular consumers of organic food. As a young single male, studying in London and doing casual labour to make ends meet, this consumer conveys that he has not yet reached a lifecycle stage where he can afford to adopt organic habits. The narrative implies that in the future, when he can afford to, he expects he will begin to buy organic food.

It is interesting to note that on the whole influences from friends and family referred to in the narratives of our sample of consumers feature mainly the positive aspects about organic consumption, such as the health and environmental benefits, rather than drawing on evidence about the negative aspects of non organic (or conventionally farmed) produce.

It is important to add that there are very few cases where influence has been directly and solely related to a one way flow of influence from another person. Influence is largely an experience of reinforcement of some existing preference and it is often a two way flow in social interaction. Although regular consumers tend to be sensitive about directly influencing others about consuming organic food, narratives convey that influence does take place in indirectly with discretion in social interactions.

5.2 The influences of external events and agents

External events refer to events in the broader social context such as public campaigns about healthy food or food scandals such as that of BSE in the UK that are documented by the mass

²⁵⁰ Regular Organic Consumer I (2)

²⁵¹ Occasional Organic Consumer F (2)

media. Often these ‘real world events’ bring notions of health and food safety to the attention of the consumer and feature in the process of research that is undertaken.

Food scandals

Narratives suggest that events such as food scandals influence consumption behaviour, perhaps highlighting how difficult it is to trust in food production.

‘I guess they [food scandals] make you more... they harden your attitude, they confirm a suspicion; might make you even more suspicious about whatever the government says about food production.’²⁵²

‘Thinking about what we put in our own body and how it is made. I mean the entire GM thing...had a huge impact on our way of thinking’²⁵³

Responses to food scandals constitute a tipping point which triggers more rigorous sourcing of organic food because of the possible threat issues about food safety pose to health. In contrast to conventional produce that may be contaminated, organic food has a good reputation and is associated with relative safety.

‘Yeah because when you asked me earlier about what triggered my... [Organic food habits] I think in the 80s there were lots of food scandals, the Edwina Currie egg scandal and BSE, that really influenced my desire not to have any meats that I don’t know how they have been sourced and treated, because I don’t trust the government or other people to...some organisations I trust but most organisations I don’t trust to do the right thing, they put money before our health.’²⁵⁴

Narrative accounts relating to the BSE food crisis bring to the forefront the concept of traceability in the food chain and a desire to have more transparency about where food has come from, especially in relation to meat products.

‘The BSE scandal did make me think about meat, processed meat especially. I’d want to have a chunk of meat that I know where it’s come from.’²⁵⁵

Responses to the beef crisis from regular consumers include the drastic measure of eliminating beef from their diet to minimise any potential risk factor.

‘I did avoid beef because I didn’t see it as worth taking the risk. Beef wasn’t important to me anyway so I didn’t see the point eating something that might have been a risk.’²⁵⁶

In one case a regular consumer recalls that the BSE crisis had a significant impact on their food habits and spurred the family on to buy organic beef. The implication here is that organic beef (and perhaps meat in general) is trustworthy and safe.

‘Certain types of meat yes...very much so I think when the beef thing was going on very important trying to find organic beef’²⁵⁷

The food scandal surrounding beef in the 1980’s did not necessarily push consumers to hunt out shopping arenas for organic meat, partly due to the limited availability of organic meat in those days. In light of current habits where there is more availability of organic and free range meat, the concern over food safety leads in some cases to organic meat consumption. Many regular

²⁵² Occasional Organic Consumer C (2)

²⁵³ Regular Organic Consumer C (b)

²⁵⁴ Regular Organic Consumer F

²⁵⁵ Occasional Organic consumer D

²⁵⁶ Regular Organic Consumer G (b)

²⁵⁷ Regular Organic Consumer A

consumers interchange the term free range with organic in terms of meat, and free range meat is often as trusted as organic meat to be safe and good.

Food scandals such as BSE, which is a life threatening disease, directly threaten the trust a consumer has for food products and has a clear influence on the care taken to source food – particularly meat products that are believed to potentially pose a threat to health. Health and safety are the motivating factors for trusting a meat product.

This health concern becomes of even more acute importance at particular stages of the life cycle.

‘I stopped eating beef when I was pregnant with my first child because the whole BSE scare was around and I wasn’t taking any chances. So I haven’t eaten beef since 94 and now I don’t like the taste of it.’²⁵⁸

The importance of food safety appears in narratives of regular consumers who are parents and highlights the importance of their role of protecting their children.

‘Yes the BSE scandal did scare me for my son. Especially when he was going to friends’ houses for tea I would worry he’d be eating burgers. I would call them and make sure he wasn’t getting beef mince because I knew they’d be getting the cheap stuff from supermarkets.’²⁵⁹

Whereas most regular consumers in our sample recount a cautionary response to BSE by changing habits, there is an exceptional regular consumer who does not speak specifically about health or safety in relation to organic food consumption. Although the narrative suggests that nutritional factors play a role in diet, organic food is not chosen because of its associated health benefits, rather for quality and taste. In correspondence with this relationship to food, specific reactions in relation to BSE are not extreme.

‘I don’t know it’s always in the background, I don’t think it would stop me eating beef.’²⁶⁰

Occasional consumers’ narratives tend to suggest there is also a lighter response to food scandals such as BSE in contrast to certain drastic responses featuring in narratives of regular consumers in our sample. The occasional consumers tend to have a more laid back approach, they do not seem to buy into the media assertion that there is an associated health risk and are generally unlikely to change their food habits and avoid foods with a possible risk factor.

‘I have quite a robust approach. I’m just not that bothered. I think people can be too careful it’s a bit like the cleaning products thing giving kids asthma, things can be too clean, you know if I drop something on the floor I’ll blow on it and eat it. Your stomach gets used to what it gets. It’s never really affected me. I remember the mars bar thing when I was about ten...rat poison. I remember stuff on the news but I don’t panic... I didn’t change my eating habits at all. The incidences were so small you have more chance of dropping dead by heart attack than getting that.’²⁶¹

‘Then there was the beef issue and it was whether you ate beef and we still ate beef as long as we felt we were buying it from a safe source. A lot of people stopped eating beef. I think those two things got us to think about our food a lot more.’²⁶²

There is an exceptional case of an occasional consumer who does respond to the BSE crisis by completely stopping the consumption of beef in the household. This occasional consumer is uncommon in their explicit concern for healthy eating. There is minimal general recounting of

²⁵⁸ Occasional Organic Consumer C

²⁵⁹ Regular Organic Consumer I

²⁶⁰ Regular Organic Consumer D

²⁶¹ Occasional Organic Consumer E

²⁶² Occasional Organic Consumer A

concern for eating healthily in the narratives of occasional consumers in comparison to accounts from dedicated and regular consumers.

Non consumers are also tend to be less motivated by concerns relating to health in relation to food and are less influenced by media scandals concerning food than both regular and occasional consumers.

‘All this stuff about avian bird flu I just ignore. It pisses me off. Scare mongering about ‘watch out for this food and that food’. It’s like foot and mouth, in Norfolk for example, you’d see burning funeral pyres of cattle; a lot of healthy animals were unnecessarily culled. I suppose that’s more about general media frenzies of scare mongering and the power of popular media networks in terms of propagating myths and ideas about foodstuffs.’²⁶³

‘The BSE crisis really didn’t put me off eating beef because I think once you have the crisis it’s too late.’²⁶⁴

Experts and Media

Influences from mass media have appeared to play a significant role in the dissemination of information about farming production, specifically highlighting the negative aspects of conventional animal husbandry practices as well as the potentials hazards associated with genetically modified food. Consumers of organic food recall some general influence from the media, while the most dedicated organic consumers provide examples of specific sources of this influence. One regular consumer for example recalls a programme about GM production that he recounts as having had a profound effect.

‘We had seen a lot of programmes talking about big industrial companies trying to sell their GM seeds like Monsanto and what was behind it, how producers were really pressurised on using their products and towards the kind of one way discussion where you have one big industrial corporation trying to push forward its products. And just by lobbying and with no...no care...basically for others’²⁶⁵

The media product mentioned by this consumer had a major and direct impact on reinforcing organic food consumption by stimulating thoughts about how food is produced. Sourcing organic food became in part an attempt to guarantee absolute lack of involvement with the GM industry. The reason for developing more conviction in favour of organic produce in this instance is based on an ethical dimension, relating to wanting to avoid products where the internal political regime of a company involved negative associations.

Consumers from all three groups mention popular television shows about food and in particular the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver is referred to as someone who has spurred positive change for food practices in the UK. An occasional consumer makes a specific reference to how Jamie Oliver has made explicit the benefits of organic food have been and how his programmes have been an influence in creating a positive image of organic food.

‘Jamie Oliver he’s got an attitude to food that I think is very positive. He somebody who is quite inspiring really...He has an attitude to food that means it’s something to enjoy making, enjoy eating. Not necessarily be too fussy but it’s a passion about food. The flavour is very important and included in that is that it’s organic and healthy.’²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Non Organic Consumer A

²⁶⁴ Non Organic Consumer B

²⁶⁵ Regular Organic Consumer C (b)

²⁶⁶ Occasional Organic Consumer D

Jamie Oliver's popular television programmes are examples of mainstream features involving organic food rather than an example of the more specialist information that more dedicated consumers will seek.

Many consumers make reference to the general mainstream television news programmes as bringing certain issues about food scandals as well as general issues about food production to their attention.

'There are stories that basically just appear in the general media. I don't subscribe to any specialist publications about organic food or animal rights or anything like that. In the general media on television there are sometimes powerful news programmes and current affairs programmes that do mention these issues. I've become aware as part of the normal media. I can't think of anything that's had a massive influence really.'²⁶⁷

This notion of picking up information from general media is credible as it corresponds with the levels of coverage given to issues of food production as well as farming crises in Britain such as foot and mouth during current years. There has also been an increase in the production and popularity of documentaries relating to food (e.g. *Super Size Me*), reality television shows (e.g. *The River Cottage*) and celebrity cooking programmes (e.g. *At home with Jamie Oliver*) since the late 1990's which have tackled and highlighted issues about food culture and production.

Specific information from mass media sources about organic production feature in news features, radio programmes, newspaper articles and magazines which are recounted as having provided important information for understanding what organic means and why it is beneficial as well as documenting problems with the food industry and farming in general.

Narratives from dedicated and regular consumers in our study who have a deeper interest in organic food show that they seek out more specialist information from less mainstream media.

'You always see things in the newspaper so I'd cut things out. I have bought the organic magazine, and I used to work for a magazine that was for positive change and food was one of the issues I had to write about once. And the internet, television programmes; there is quite a lot on farming now.'²⁶⁸

In particular there is a small subset of regular organic consumers in our sample who make reference to certain publications that they read that have influenced them or developed their awareness about the environment, sustainability and organic food such as 'The Ecologist' and 'Ethical Consumer'.

'I guess magazines that Charlie gets like the 'ecologist' and the 'ethical consumer'... bits I read filter in.'²⁶⁹

Other specific media products are mentioned as having been read by more than one consumer such as Felicity Lawrence's book 'Not on the Label' which includes an article about chicken slaughtering and processing plants. This article is clear to point out that organic chicken follows exactly the same processing method as non organic and documents the brutality of the process. The consumers in our sample that recount reading this article respond in exactly the same way – by cutting chicken completely from their diet.

²⁶⁷ Occasional Organic Consumer D

²⁶⁸ Regular Organic Consumer I

²⁶⁹ Regular Organic Consumer B

'I read that book, Felicity Lawrence – 'Not on the label'. It coincided with my youngest when we went to a wildlife park there were chickens running around and he just loved them and when we came home he said I'm not eating chicken any more. But it's difficult because it smells lovely when it's cooking. We make jerk chicken, Caribbean style and it does smell good but knowing how the chickens are treated and organic chickens too, I had to give up.'²⁷⁰

This change of mind refers to two separate incidences, one of research and one of emotional experience which reinforce and re-describe a decision. Reference is also made to elements of resistance ('smells lovely') but in the final analysis the negative points outweigh the positive. In further reference to chicken, a number of consumers in our sample make reference to a television documentary produced by a celebrity chef Hugh Fernley Whittingstall who campaigns about the battery production method of chicken being characterised by lack of welfare of the animal. In his programmes he endorses organic and free range chicken in preference.

One occasional organic consumer in our sample asserts that since watching the programme he has learnt that it is worth paying for an organic chicken and incurring the marginal cost. In such a context the presenter Whittingstall assumes the role of expert on the topic of animal husbandry.

'He took four people into his little farmhouse place and showed them the life of chickens and tried to get them all to buy organic. I think the mission was to show people, convert people and show them exactly what is happening to the food and where their food is coming from. It showed you the battery hen's life and you look at these animals and they looked really diseased, to be honest. After that programme I am not buying, when you can pay another £1.50 for an organic one I will. Definitely yeah, that programme taught me that much, that £1.50 is nothing compared to the welfare of the poor chicken'²⁷¹

'There have been an increasing amount of documentaries about food. And people are getting more passionate about farming practices, local produce. Like Hugh Fernley Whittingstall raising awareness on the debate. I've read his book on meat and that's quite informative'²⁷²

5.3 First Encounters with Organic Food and Changes of mind

We have drawn on the ideas of Howard Gardner who makes a distinction between abrupt changes of mind and changes of mind that occurs gradually over time. The aim is to understand how and why a mind change occurs with respect to organic food habits, for current organic consumers. We have found that the most common change of mind and habits in organic food consumption occurs gradually and the influences have been multiple, broad ranging and that the timings of change have been difficult to pinpoint with clarity. It is interesting that most consumers do not recall their first encounter with organic food. This finding is significant in itself as it suggests that organic shopping has become habitualised over time and that habits began long ago.

As discussed in section 2.2, one regular consumer recalls a farm visit which deepened and reinforced an existent conviction about organic food and led directly to the household organising to receive a weekly box of organic vegetables.

²⁷⁰ Regular Organic Consumer H (2)

²⁷¹ Occasional Organic Consumer B

²⁷² Occasional Organic Consumer E

The only consumer who can actually remember the first organic product they bought happens to be a non organic consumer who bought a bar of fair trade chocolate that happened to be organic as well.

'I do remember the first organic thing I ate that was marketed as organic, where organic was a selling point was Maya Gold which I bought because it was Fair trade – I think it was the first fair trade product...' ²⁷³

Whereas this current non organic consumer did not go on to develop organic food habits, the narrative suggests he has loyalty for fair-trade products due to value based reasons relating to social justice. This is one example of how first encounters with organic food are not necessarily followed by habits. This consumer has a family background lacking in healthy eating habits which may be one factor explaining why health is not an important food consideration and organic food is rejected. Regular and occasional consumers who recount a family background of unhealthy or traditional food appear to have experienced a specific trigger through education or from an interest in exercise along their life journey which has brought health concern into the arena of food.

Few others can pin point a specific time when they first started to buy organic food. Emotionally charged events such as the experience of diet related illness or breast cancer are recalled as significant vehicles of general lifestyle change. Changes of habits have tended to be gradual in response to increasing availability of organic products at mainstream shopping venues, wide media coverage about topics relating to organic food as well as the development of informal social networks where new ideas are channelled and circulated.

Availability of organic food has increased substantially in the UK over the last ten years and this 'real world event' has facilitated regular organic habits.

Influences on changes of mind and habits in relation to the arena of food choice are generally related to a range of complex value based reasons that can not simply be reduced to a single event, person or epiphanic realisation. Specific personal and external events and personalities as well as the increased availability of organic food, all constitute 'tipping points' which deepen conviction about, or make easier the purchasing of, organic food.

To summarise, when change of mind occurs in favour of organic food it is not always matched with a full change in food habits which does not tend to be dramatic, rather it occurs as part of a complex process and an ongoing practice of shopping and discovering new products.

5.4 Conclusion: Major influences on regular consumption of organic food as compared with occasional and non-consumption

Looking at the factors which influence regular consumption of organic food from a lifecycle perspective our findings show that some degree of initial influence takes place during childhood, within the context of the family home. In most cases this form of influence is indirectly linked to organic food, such as encouragement for healthy eating habits, or practices of growing vegetables in the garden. A minimal number of regular consumers had parents who consumed organically

²⁷³ Non Organic Consumer C

and were therefore directly influenced by their parents' organic food habits and continued in line with these in adulthood.

There are differences in influences from childhood and not all regular consumers recount being influenced by their parents. Some regular consumers even describe parents' food habits as unhealthy recounting that values regarding health, nutrition and sustainability have emerged during adulthood through a variety of other influences. Values associated with ecological sustainability are central motivations to consume organically, with knowledge being acquired through social networks as well as through a variety of mainstream and alternative media.

Narratives of regular consumers suggest that the lifecycle phase when food habits are most likely to change is when a transition into adulthood has occurred. This is characterised by an increase in financial resources as well as cohabitation with a significant partner. It is at this time that responsibilities are taken more seriously and more care is taken in the negotiation of food matters. The experience of pregnancy or the expected arrival of a baby strengthens and deepens this sense of responsibility and can trigger a change in mind about food and convictions to eat a healthy organic diet become firmer.

A specific household event which has occurred in changes of mind with regard to regular organic consumption in our sample is the onset of serious illness or other health related concerns. This was not a common event in our sample, a total of two regular and two occasional consumers mentioned illness as an influence on changing food habits. For one regular consumer who suffered from breast cancer, her experience of this disease had a major influence on her diet and she changed her food habits in favour of organic products for very specific product categories. The other cases of food allergy were clear to point out that the illnesses themselves were not completely central in their decision to buy organic food, but were one factor amongst others. Through the process of research and the experience of sourcing special food often from alternative food outlets consumers may have been exposed to organic products they have previously have overlooked.

Friends and colleagues are also found to influence organic consumers. Often the dedicated regular consumers in our sample belong to friendship circles where organic consumption is part of a broader commitment to concepts of sustainability and the ecology of the planet. Such social networks produce common identifications for organic consumption as well providing forums for information exchange which reinforces reasons and expands knowledge.

Another strong influence which is recalled in consumer narratives is the influence from the mass media and other media sources. Many consumers recall specific experiences of programmes or articles that have influenced their opinions about food and habits. Television programmes about the negative methods of conventional farming and GM production as well as other programmes about the positive aspects of organic food have been reported as sources of influence by regular consumers. Radio programmes, books and magazines also feature in narratives as having strong and sometimes direct influence on consumers' habits. Experts such as Hugh Fernley Whittingstall and Jamie Oliver (celebrity chefs) are cited by a number of consumers as being at the forefront of influence about food in the mainstream media and as having an encouraging impact on organic food habits. While a more alternative experience of an expert opinion comes from Felicity Lawrence and her book 'Not on the Label'. Both consumers who recall reading an article in this book were directly influenced to cease their consumption of chicken.

Food scandals often sensationalised by the mass media play a powerful role in influencing people and their food habits. The BSE crisis in the 1980's is recalled by every respondent in our sample, while some chose to accept the risk and carry on eating beef others responded by attempting to source organic beef or by cutting beef products from the diet. The scandal surrounding eggs and the risk of salmonella in the late 1980's, was also reported as having impacted on food habits and many consumers responded by opting to buy free range or organic eggs.

Most of the regular consumers in our sample describe the change of mind and habits towards organic consumption as having taken place gradually over a period of time. Both the cognitive decision to adopt organic food habits as well as the practice of buying them emerged in a gradual way. This gradual change fits in with our understanding of how difficult a process changing habits actually is. Partly the availability of organic produce in the past was minimal in terms of product type as well as mainstream supply and this would have posed a barrier to consumption. The growth in the organic market in the UK has been steady, the product range has expanded and changes in the consumption of regular consumers of organic food follow these patterns.

6. Conclusions: The character of demand for organic foods

This section of the report draws upon the analysis presented in the previous sections and will examine how this can be applied to explore future demand for organic food in the UK. The discussion will mainly relate to the habits of regular consumers of organic food. Regular (and indeed dedicated regular) consumers of organic food are the group who have developed a relatively distinct mindset about organic food in comparison to the occasional and organic consumers in the UK sample. They are also the group that demonstrate most loyalty and commitment to the organic cause and organic buying practice.

6.1 Organic consumption as a change of mind and habits

This study has attempted to apply the ideas from the work of Howard Gardner who argues that a change of mind leading to the development of a new mindset will simultaneously lead to a change in practice and habits (Gardner 2004). In relation to organic food consumption, we have examined the biographical narratives of consumers in relation to food and their corresponding food habits in order to assess this approach. Using Gardner's theory we anticipated that a change of mind in terms of positive support for organic food products would inevitably bring about a change in purchasing behaviour towards organic food. Put simply, we would expect that actions and habits straight-forwardly mirror beliefs and opinions. However, the picture we find with the UK consumers does not straightforwardly match this expectation. We have therefore experienced some problems with Gardner's theory of Changing Minds. Within the 'real world' context of the contemporary organic food market in the UK, consumers with a positive mind set in favour of organic food may not consistently be able to practice the food habits they desire. It is possible to identify reasons why there may be barriers to organic food consumption.

Firstly, the organic market in the UK does not always facilitate a growth in consumer demand. The actual availability of organic food products across all food categories is not always present in mainstream shopping arenas, and this directly influences consumption trends. So, consumers are restricted by this practical dimension of availability as well as convenience and price. Secondly,

consumers do not behave in a neat and coherent manner even when they have developed a mind set. We have found that regular and occasional consumers of organic food experience cognitive and emotional barriers to organic consumption relating to levels of conviction and feelings of trust for organic food.

What we have found is that the consumers with most regular organic food habits do not experience a distinct change of mind about organic food which leads to new organic food habits – but instead the beginnings of organic habits relate to values that develop, and food experiences that occur, early on in life, corresponding strongly with values instilled during childhood or early adulthood. Interestingly, change is often unnoticed and memories of the beginning of organic food habits seldom recalled. This in itself reflects how organic food habits become normalised over time for regular consumers. A gradual adoption of organic food habits occurs with certain life-cycle events and various ‘real world’ external events constituting important tipping points, rather than constituting a jolting changing of mind. In some cases, however, confrontation with media footage about animal welfare triggers a shock reaction which again constitutes an often acute tipping point towards organic food consumption.

The dedicated and regular consumers of organic food that took part in the study in the UK have a strong commitment to modes of organic production, sympathy for ideas relevant to the wider organic movement, as well as confidence in the benefits of organic food products. Value based reasons for organic consumption, are underpinned by trust that organic production systems in fact deliver products that tally with these. Trust is strongest amongst dedicated consumers who show most conviction for organic food and are most willing to persevere against the constraints of contemporary life to purchase organic food.

If belief in the superiority of organic food products, and trust that they are authentically in line with standards, is the main determinant of regular organic habits then it is important to address the question; where does trust come from and how is it constructed? From analysis of the narratives, we find that trust is intuitively rather than logically founded, and that evidence in support of the perceived benefits of organic food is neither substantive nor is it analysed in depth.

In fact, lack of extensive knowledge about organic food production and farming is a key element of the findings from our analysis of consumer narratives. Consumers appear to choose to believe or disbelieve in the benefits of organic food. There is evidence of self persuasion which comes from believing, for example, the explicit assertion that organic food tastes better even before it has been tasted. Therefore, we can suggest that detailed knowledge about organic farming does not inspire trust and is not a significant element in producing organic food and regular organic food habits. Value-based reasons which support organic consumption habits ring bells that intuitively fit in with a consumer’s general ideological mind set.

Value based reasons include notions about ‘external care’ such as ecological sustainability and animal welfare, as well as concepts about the more immediate value of ‘personal care’. On the one hand, value based reasons relating to ‘personal care’ in this context are included within the private arena of the family with specific reference to the personal health of family members. On the other hand, ‘external care’ benefits are identified outside the domain of the family and refer to caring about the collective ‘common good’ and are found to relate to contemporary debates around sustainability such as food miles and climate change. We have found that actions to consume organic food for both ‘personal care’ and ‘external care’ benefits are validated, re-described and reinforced by the experiences of satisfaction with products with regard to quality and taste.

At the heart of consumer beliefs about 'personal care' benefits is a concern for personal health. Concerns about healthy eating feature as a central element in life stories about the current food habits of regular and occasional organic consumers. This value based reason to consume organic food because it is better for personal health is based on a belief that organically produced food is pure and unadulterated and contains no trace of pesticides and chemicals which are thought to be potentially detrimental to physical health.

It is useful to clarify the relationship between 'personal care' and 'external care'. On the one hand we can see that perceived 'personal care' benefits provide reasons to consume organic food which relate to the value of sustaining good health for the future by minimising potential risks and hopefully boosting longevity. Therefore, 'personal care' can be seen as relating to concepts of individualism where the important concern is protection of the self and immediate family. 'External care' on the other hand, refers to the longevity (and sustainability) of the planet, and by definition involves collective engagement. For dedicated and most regular organic consumers, 'external care' is an extension and reinforcement of this 'personal care' value – the sustainability of the planet involves taking care of resources and protecting the eco-system for the sake of future well being. A mindset which values life and involves respect and care for people and planet, is a driving force for regular organic food habits and is relatively consistent amongst regular consumers of organic food. However, we did find a group of 'super-market' orientated regular and occasional consumers in our sample who are mainly motivated to consume organic food by the principle of 'personal care'. Perhaps the majority of regular consumers, who link their organic food habits to collective positive social change, express a political element within their food habits. There is potential for future investigation into this.

As has been clarified, the decision to adopt organic food habits develops slowly, alongside gradually developing opinions and evaluations about the benefits of organic food.

One might expect that once a value based mind set has developed shopping habits will automatically reflect these values. As has already been suggested, this is not always the case in the UK. Explanations consumers give about the gradual state of changing habits are varied.

Developing a mind set is itself a complex, delicate and often slow process. In the case of organic food consumption, a mind set favouring organic food is often linked to practical issues such as availability, easy sourcing and competitive pricing of such food. Many narratives refer to the realities of shopping organically and raise issues about the barriers to further consumption such as the availability of goods, minimal organic ranges as well as the issue of the premium cost of organic food. Consumption habits have increased over time for consumers who are aware that prices have become more competitive and availability has increased.

Certainly, the gradual change of food habits takes place in light of the expansion of the organic market. The growth of both product ranges and publicity in recent years has enabled consumers to experiment with products from an increased range of categories, to access organic food more easily and to experience organic food at a lower cost than in previous times. For many, these changes in price have been significant as tipping points in their changing shopping habits, enabling them to live out their aspirations for real.

Within the context of gradual change of food habits, in favour of organic food, what emerges from the analysis is a spectrum of organic conviction with consumers possessing varying levels of

commitment. For each level of conviction we can identify variations in beliefs held about organic food.

Dedicated regular organic consumers appear to have a strong 'faith' about the virtues of organic food and a firm ideological conviction that organic food production is fairer, more humane and healthier, thereby linked to the 'common good' of society. As keen researchers, dedicated consumers tend to seek the information they desire about food traceability, ecological well-being and animal welfare. This is achieved through speaking to shop keepers, food producers and reading labels as well as articles in specialist publications. However, as has been suggested, knowledge about organic farming and production methods is minimal for all consumers and does not necessarily inspire trust or conviction. Video footage of shopping trips suggests that interaction with shop-keepers and producers reinforces confidence and trust in organic products. Dedicated consumers are willing to attempt, and possess the resources, to transcend practical barriers such as availability, convenience and price if they can. Dedicated consumers also validate claims about 'external care' and 'personal care' benefits with concepts about the superior taste and quality of organic food.

Regular organic consumers have weaker overall conviction of the benefits of organic food, although health benefits are perceived as a common factor. Regular consumers exhibit selective organic consumption; different organic products are positioned on a hierarchy of importance relating to perceived 'personal' and 'external' care benefits. Organic items which are most regularly consumed are items that are believed to differ most from conventional produce and therefore believed to have the greatest benefits. Regular consumers tend to have patterns of shopping which mean convenience and availability prohibit further organic food consumption.

Occasional organic consumers tend to purchase specific organic food products infrequently and tend to be sceptical about the benefits of organic food with a degree of cynicism about the organic food sector which prohibits broader consumption. There is less action to research about food products and less willingness to carefully source the 'authentic' food that is desired. Some occasional consumers gain confidence in food products from interaction with producers as direct points of sale. Occasional consumers have a yearning for more information and better labelling which will provide reassurance about the production and certification of organic produce – especially products that come from outside the EU. In similarity to regular consumers, occasional consumers are constrained by aspects of convenience, price and the availability of organic food.

6.2 Influences on the development of organic food habits

In this section we will examine the influence of the role of the family, social networks, and life-cycle, and external events and agents on the development of organic mind sets and habits. As we have identified in the previous sub-section, there is a widespread and relatively coherent mind set that emerges through adopting regular organic habits. There is also a spectrum of conviction for organic food based on beliefs in the superiority of organic food and on levels of trust that organic really does deliver the benefits it promises.

As we have already noted, the organic market in the UK has had a powerful influence on the shopping habits of regular consumers of organic food. However, this 'real world' event may be central in the development of habits, but is not the only factor that plays a part in the construction

of organic habits. A range of past experiences can be identified which have had a powerful influence on the development of an orientation towards organic food.

The role of the family appears to be fundamental in the development of organic food habits and food habits in general. Parental influence on the development of engagement (or lack of) with food is found in all stories. We can assume that to some extent current food habits are a product of a gradual evolution based on early experiences. It is possible to identify a number of distinct narrative structures.

In some stories, consumers' current organic food habits and the related values have a positive identification with those learnt through their family, conforming largely to the past experiences of parental food values. These values tend to relate to notions of healthy eating, home-grown and home-cooked food. There is a logical development during the life cycle process to adopt, adapt and develop these values.

Upbringing and specific parental values about health have affected consumers' food habits in relation to healthy eating habits and organic consumption, through the practice of home grown vegetables, vegetarianism as well as through concepts which value the ecological well being of the planet. This background has a reinforcing influence on food habits during the stage in adulthood when decisions about food become subject to scrutiny.

For other regular organic consumers the story is one of rebellion away from traditional modes of food practice. The traditional British meal of 'meat and two veg' is viewed as unhealthy and associated with a working class meal tradition. Social class mobility is relevant within the process of changing food habits, and changes in food habits can be viewed as a reaction against past family practices. Food habits can be expressive of social aspirations and changes in social status.

Another narrative form we have identified as relevant to the formation of organic food habits relates directly to health, often triggered by a personal or familial experience of ill health. Such an experience can inspire a flowering of new interest about food, how it affects the body and the possible causes of illness. Research is carried out in relation to food, to gather explanations and ascribe causes to the experience of illness.

Lifecycle events that influence organic consumption by strengthening reasons in support or by tipping consumers towards organic food habits are those that have taken place within particular households. Such events include pregnancy, the birth of a baby, the experience of a serious illness such as breast cancer and the experience of a diet related illness or food allergy.

The lifestyle phase event of the transition into adulthood which tends to involve a paid job being secured for the first time and a household being established, brings about a new sense of responsibility, more consideration for issues of personal health and a more stable and mature approach to lifestyle. This stage is often accompanied by a new sense of economic freedom where aspirations relating to organic food consumption can be more easily realised.

Our findings suggest that one strong channel of influence on the mind sets of British organic consumers comes from a variety of mainstream and alternative media. Many consumers in our sample recall having read an article or having seen a feature on the news which informed them about organic production. Few in this context recall a specific media example directly featuring organic food which triggered a direct influence. It is also relevant to note that all mainstream media sources recalled by consumers refer to the negative aspects of conventional or non-organic

food production such as Genetically Modified crops or the welfare of battery hens, rather than explicitly highlighting the positive character of organic production. It is almost by default that organic food is viewed as an attractive alternative.

There has been one media event recalled by a number of regular and occasional consumers as having a powerful impact on subsequent food habits. This was a television programme about battery chickens, featuring brutal, visual scenes of animal cruelty. Produced by a celebrity chef who campaigns about the poor welfare of battery chickens in the UK, this programme endorses the consumption of organic chicken. However, it is important to comment that such programmes would have been viewed by millions of the British public, including non organic consumers in our sample. Non organic consumers who have a clear mind set that organic food is not better than the conventional produce they purchase, also recall watching this programme but it did not influence their shopping habits in favour of organic food. What we find is that those who are influenced by such media, are consumers who already have some affiliation to organic consumption. Therefore, this form of influence constitutes a tipping point rather than triggering a drastic change in food habits.

Food scandals relevant to the organic debate feature in consumer narratives and details are recalled readily. These include the BSE crisis, the eggs and salmonella food scandal triggered by Edwina Curry in the late 1980's, and more recently, a programme called 'School Dinners' presented by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver. Although consumers do not always recount such media as having a direct impact on their food habits, it is fair to say that consumers are influenced indirectly by such heavily reported food scandals. For dedicated and most regular consumers, response to food scandals has involved temporary drastic changes in food habits, such as eliminating the risk food completely. In light of the negative content of the media sources about various conventional produce, it can be said that convictions about organic food grow stronger as it is perceived as a safe and healthy alternative. For some regular and occasional organic consumers, these external events trigger off alarm bells about conventional production and constitute tipping points towards organic food consumption which are important in the formation of regular habits.

Regular and occasional consumers also make reference to media coverage about health issues and the role healthy eating plays in general health. Health campaigns such as the five a day vegetable campaign are mentioned as being a backdrop to everyday living, rather than a major influence. On the whole, we have found that consumers in the UK do not speak about sustaining a healthy body or keeping in shape. Body image and aesthetic considerations do not appear to be related to the healthy eating orientation of British regular and occasional organic consumers. It is important to comment that in Britain notions about what is appropriate include a minimal emphasis on image and looking good. Explicit concern for body image is not part of a British normative tradition. However, this doesn't mean that British consumers are not motivated by this aspect of health. As has been previously discussed, dedicated, regular and occasional consumers are motivated to consumer organic food partly because they believe in the health benefits. Those who speak most about health are either those with an athletic history who mention nutrition as an important health concern, those who are at later stages of the life-cycle or those who have suffered illness. Influences on healthy eating habits in this context do not seem to relate to mainstream media, but to originate from parental influence and are reinforced through social or alternative health networks or a team of athletes where stories about health and nutrition are exchanged.

In addition to the external sources of influence on organic food habits, we have found that regular consumers are also influenced by incidences that arise and interaction that takes place in their everyday lives. The social domain of work, community groups and word of mouth by friends and acquaintances all contribute to the formation of organic food habits.

This kind of influence, in contrast to the influence from the external media, involves stories which are positive about the benefits of organic food rather than negative about other modes of food production. The impression given by consumers is that in such scenarios communication takes the form of an exchange which reinforces existing beliefs.

While consumers report that they themselves are influenced by these familiar channels of communication, when asked if they would influence others about organic food, most consumers reported that they would not want to interfere with the private matter of another person's food habits. Amongst dedicated consumers, however, we find incidences of direct and deliberate influence of others with specific regard to the benefits of eating organic food. Regular consumers also influence others, though less directly, for example, by inviting people to eat organic food at their homes.

6.3 Barriers to increasing demand

This section will detail a summary of our findings relating to barriers that get in the way of current demand for and consumption of organic food products, and could possibly pose an obstacle to the potential development of future demand. We have found that barriers to organic consumption vary quite a lot amongst consumers. We have also found that we can identify two different types of barrier to organic consumption. The first type relates to practical barriers, for example, price differences between organic and non organic food products, availability in supermarkets and range of organic products available. The second type relates less to practical obstacles and more to emotional or cognitive barriers such as trust and belief that organic fulfils certain credentials.

One practical barrier experienced is that of the premium price for organic foods in comparison to conventional produce. This tends to stop many consumers from buying an extensive range of organic food, with the exception of a group of dedicated regular consumers. Dedicated organic consumers tend to shop in specialist outlets where the premium for organic food is often above competitive market value. They differ from other consumers in their relationship to the price of organic food, for they appear to not be influenced by price at all and claim to not be aware of food prices.

However, regular, occasional and non organic consumers all comment that the price premium poses a considerable barrier to organic consumption. Of course occasional and non organic consumers generally are aware of this price premium and in response do not include the possibility of consuming organic food in their shopping agenda. In response to this barrier of price, some occasional consumers will buy organic food when prices are reduced or products are on special offer. Some regular consumers require a drop in price before they will extend their organic consumption. Regular consumers also comment that the price premium for certain organic food products poses a definite barrier to consumption and make particular reference to organic soft fruit (strawberries, raspberries) and certain organic vegetables where the premium is considered unjustifiably high. These regular consumers opt to choose specific organic products where the price premium is not particularly large and where they believe the benefits to health

will be most notable – for example root vegetables are believed to absorb a high degree of pesticides and therefore organic carrots are considered worth paying the extra for. Another response to the price premium of organic food for some regular consumers is to shop in places that are perceived to be the most competitively priced, which tend to be large chain supermarkets.

However, a group of ‘alternatively orientated’ regular consumers believe that organic food supplied by a supermarket is inauthentic and is viewed with suspicion, constituting an emotional barrier to organic consumption within this domain. There is a British reticence about the ostentatious promotion of organic food in this context, as well as an anti-commercial negativity towards the supermarket. The related suspicion is that excessive profiteering takes place in the supermarket organic industry. Even though prices for organic food are generally lower in a supermarket context, some consumers prefer to source organic food from smaller, alternative locations. There is a barrier of mistrust in relation to the supermarket corporations (in particular Tesco) who market organic produce, as they are often perceived to have vested interests, hidden agendas and no genuine concern or value for organic food production beyond profit. As Clarke et al (2008) suggests there is a ‘perceived yawning gap between the supposedly “authentic” and ethical organic food which comes from small-scale, idyllic counter-cultural farms, and the supposedly “mainstream” and less-than-ethical organic food supposedly produced on industrial, corporate but environmentally responsible farms’²⁷⁴. However,

Lack of trust also constitutes a cognitive barrier to organic consumption. Mistrust arises with reference to organic produce that is grown abroad, especially outside the EU. Because there is not one universal labelling system for organic produce, consumers feel uncertain about whether they can trust the legitimacy of certification and monitoring procedures overseas.

Another example of a barrier affecting increasing organic consumption relates to concern for environmental issues relating to organic food, such as food miles. Many regular organic consumers express a value for environmental sustainability. However, they also comment that many organic products (especially vegetables and fruit) are air freighted into the UK often arriving from outside Europe. The negative association with food miles poses a massive barrier to the decision to buy organic food and the question about whether non-organic but locally produced food is preferable often emerges. On this point we conclude that the currently available assortment of local organic products constitutes a barrier to meeting the potential consumer demand.

On a practical level, the availability and supply of organic products as well as limitations in terms of product range are experienced as barriers which limit increasing demand. Many regular and dedicated organic consumers would like to see a more extensive range of products in a variety of shopping venues. This includes a wider range of fresh organic fruit and vegetables in small greengrocers and farmers markets. Dedicated regular consumers in particular view organic production as a serious, important sustainable form of food provision and hope to see expansion and improvement of the organic system.

6.4 Potentialities for future demand – an extrapolation

This study has compared the qualitative data from the biographical narratives and the observed and filmed shopping trips of consumers who regularly consume organic food in comparison to

²⁷⁴ Clarke, N., et al., 2008. The spaces and ethics of organic food. *Journal of Rural Studies* (2008), doi: 10.1016/j.jrurstud.2007.12.008

consumers who occasionally and never do so. Together with the contribution of some quantitative findings from British consumers we have the basis for producing some insights into potential future demand of organic food.

As has been discussed in this section we have found indications in the UK that the demand for organic food products is likely to increase in the future, especially amongst existing dedicated and regular consumers, and potentially amongst occasional consumers. The value based foundations for organic food preference are held strongly and commonly feature in regular consumers' narratives. This suggests that there is scope for further development in terms of organic buying habits especially if product ranges expand, availability increases, and prices fall. That organic ranges have expanded and prices have gone down is viewed as positive in terms of potential for the future, and consumers certainly believe that organic prices will continue to become more competitive.

Dedicated organic consumers, with their strong conviction about the benefits of organic food and commitment to supporting organic production, do not expect or hope for a future drop in organic food prices. Instead they are characteristic of the ecological citizens described in the study by Seyfang (2006) who conclude that 'the current price differential between organic and conventional produce is an illusory incentive'²⁷⁵. They tend to consume a wide range of organic products including high quality products and speciality products and are regularly looking to experiment with new organic products and expand the range they buy. Evidence from the narratives of this group of consumers suggests that dedicated consumers will continue to consume organic food and as the market develops will even broaden their existing habits.

To facilitate future development of organic consumption, however, the barriers which constrain the less convinced consumers, i.e. some regular and occasional consumers, about the benefits of organic food, need to be addressed.

Mistrust in the organic sector is a significant barrier to organic consumption. This relates partly to a mistrust of governance which is characteristic of British culture. Narratives from this study back up an idea that the British public don't have faith in the practices of government and believe there is a non identification between the state and the interests of citizens. Mistrust also relates to the way that organic food has come to be perceived by some occasional and non organic consumers. Once it may have been accepted as a viable alternative food, but, as Guthman (1998, 2003, 2004) suggests in her study of organic agriculture in California, organic food has become more "yuppie chow"²⁷⁶.

We would like to address the question about what will produce greater trust in organic food for British consumers who are sceptical about the actual benefits. We suggest that knowledge provision or increasing information about organic production methods is in itself unlikely to produce trust in organic products or attract more organic consumers. However, clearer labelling about regulations and certification procedures, including profiles of particular farmers and verification about the positive aspects of certification, may inspire greater confidence in consumers who already have some affiliation towards food that is healthy, natural and sustainable. Taking into account the reticence about supermarkets promotion of organic food,

²⁷⁵ Seyfang, G., 2006. Ecological citizenship and sustainable consumption: Examining local organic food networks. *Journal of Rural Studies* 22 (2006). P.390.

²⁷⁶ Clarke, N., et al., 2008. The spaces and ethics of organic food. *Journal of Rural Studies* (2008), doi: 10.1016/j.jrurstud.2007.12.008

which appears to be a peculiarity of some British consumers, future promotion of organic food needs to be carried out with sensitivity.

In the contemporary context, with the rise in diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cancer and heart disease, which are linked to Western diets and lifestyles; consumers are becoming motivated by personal health. Health is a central motivation for current organic habits, and as we have suggested, for many consumers this relates to values about healthy eating which are introduced during early years. An important aspect of the future of organic food will be the children of the present day and it will be useful to explore how policies about food education for both parents and children will work in practice. To encourage current non organic consumers to engage with organic food it is necessary to think about what kind of ideas may produce greater awareness about the health benefits of organic food.

In light of the increasing publicity about the impending crisis of climate change, involving an energy crisis and environmental threat, as well as concerns about social injustices related to modes of international trade, there is some evidence to suggest that consumers are taking more active responsibility as citizens and evaluating lifestyle choices. Citizen- consumerism is a concept which refers to how consumers apply their political values to decisions in the shopping arena. Dobson (2003)²⁷⁷ defines 'ecological citizenship' as a shared personal commitment to sustainability and suggests that it can be viewed as a driving force for the practice of sustainable consumption.

For those who practice 'ecological citizenship'; every day activities within the private sphere, such as cycling rather than driving or organic food consumption, are conscious citizenly actions which are believed to benefit a common good. This perspective sees people as global citizens rather than people of particular states, and citizenly interest is therefore extended to benefit the Earth as a whole.

The dedicated UK consumers in this study see their commitment to organic consumption as part of an attempt to act as citizens by taking action outside of the Political arena, to create a better future, where connections with where food has come from are cultivated, small businesses are supported, a sense of community is kept alive and social and environmental concerns are addressed. This is achieved partly through consumption patterns which involve independence from global corporations and supermarkets.

However, increasing concern for sustainability appears to impact on how consumers prioritise food concerns and there appears to be a conflict in fulfilling parallel priorities. For example the concern for the social injustices of international trade and this being an effective route towards sustainable development for poorer countries, conflicts with the rationale for localising food supply chains to reduce the impacts of 'food miles'.

This may simply have a positive impact on the demand for organic food which is generally perceived as more sustainable than conventional food products, as it is less resource dependent and more environmentally friendly.

However, as Seyfang (2006)²⁷⁸ indicates, in 2003 65% of organic produce eaten in the UK was imported. In light of consumer concern about 'food miles' for distribution, climate threat may

²⁷⁷ Dobson, A., 2003. *Citizenship and the Environment*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

²⁷⁸ Seyfang, G., 2006. Ecological citizenship and sustainable consumption: Examining local organic food networks. *Journal of Rural Studies* 22 (2006) 383-395.

also constitute a barrier to increasing demand of imported organic food as consumers prioritise local, non organic food if they cannot source a local organic option. However, a more recent figure from the Soil Association claims that 'approximately 66% of the organic primary produce sold in multiple retailers was sourced in the UK in 2005'²⁷⁹. This suggests that the availability of local, organic food in the UK is increasing. If local organic food continues to be increasingly available, it will be a positive factor for the future of the organic market. Local food can be seen as a sustainable form which corresponds to 'ecological citizenship'. As suggested by Clarke et al (2008), 'local food brings local freedom spurning the shaping of the locale by distant others in favour of a local which represents a place of caring resistance, a place of hope, an unfolding line of flight which counterposes the demands of globalised capital'.²⁸⁰

Growth in popularity for local produce will partly depend on motivations consumers have for global issues such as international trade. Dedicated consumers are the group who are most likely to report buying and supporting Fair Trade products. It is important to note that dedicated organic consumers are not representative of the general population but instead they can be described as a highly motivated group of citizen consumers who are conversant in discourses of sustainable consumption.

The current global food shortage, driven by poor harvests, changes in US production to ethanol for bio-fuel, rising populations and a shift in food preferences towards increased meat consumption in developing countries such as China and India, is having an impact on food prices in the UK. How consumers react to rises in food prices will be significant for the future demand of organic food. We expect organic production to be more energy efficient than conventional production, to consist of shorter supply chains and to have no dependence on expensive chemicals. Perhaps, then, we can predict that as the world is changing, the relative premium of organic food will drop and if so organic food will become relatively more attractive to consumers other than those who are already dedicated.

²⁷⁹<http://www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nsf/librarytitles/20CC2.HTML>

²⁸⁰ Clarke, N., et al., 2008. The spaces and ethics of organic food. *Journal of Rural Studies* (2008), doi: 10.1016/j.jrurstud.2007.12.008

APPENDIX I

This table shows which regular consumers can be described as ‘Dedicated Organic Food Consumers’:

ID	Does the consumer choose shops in order to maximize possibility of purchasing a very large amount of organic products?	Does the consumer actively search for new arenas in which e.g. ethical consumption is made possible?	The consumer has friends and networks in which the topic of organic food is discussed and habits with respect to organic consumption tend to be mutually reinforcing.	Does the consumer try to re-command or influence people outside nearest family to purchase organic food?	Range of organic products purchased among the dedicated regular users ²⁸¹	Does the consumer exclude many organic products because of the price premium?
Regular A	NO		NO	NO		YES
Regular B	NO	NO	YES	NO	.	YES
Regular C	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES , vegetables, chicken, soya products,	TO SOME EXTENT (in particular meat products)
Regular D	NO	NO	NO	NO		YES
Regular E	YES	YES	YES	YES		NO
Regular F	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES . Fruit, pulses, grains, meat, dairy, vegetables	NO
Regular G	NO	NO	YES	NO		NO
Regular H	YES	NO	YES	YES		NO

²⁸¹ The organic products listed here indicate those the consumer bought during the shopping trip or were stated explicitly during the interview products that she/he usually bought.

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