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Consumption of Organic Foods from a Life History
Perspective:
An Exploratory Study of British Consumers

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Chapter 1 Exploring the development of organic consumption in Britain

1.1. Introduction

This report describes an investigation of consumer attitudes towards organic products, based on interviews and observation in two British cities, London and Bristol. It analyses narratives drawing on life history, events and influences to explain evolving consumer behaviour with regard to purchasing and consumption of organic products. It is part of a larger study of reported buying behaviour of organic and other consumers: the investigation has been replicated in Denmark and Italy; and further studies of actual shopping patterns have been undertaken, based on till roll data and large-scale structured questionnaires.

This report focuses on issues related to the development of attitudes over time, and on understanding the likely development of future patterns of demand for organic products. Because this is difficult to achieve using conventional methods, we have attempted to uncover the development of buying habits, which allows us to identify and extrapolate potential trends with reference to future demand.

The report is divided into five further chapters. Firstly, we describe the study method, sampling procedures and the characteristics of interviewees. Secondly, we provide some context for the qualitative material by briefly describing the overall development of the organic market in Britain. Following this, we report on the analysis and results of the investigation, and the final chapter concludes by summarising insights obtained on the character of demand for organic foods in Britain.

1.2. Objectives and methods

This study is one of three which have been conducted within the framework of the European Commission-financed Sixth Framework project, QLIF (Quality and Safety of Low Input Food); the other two have been completed simultaneously in Italy and Denmark. These studies aim to understand the future demand for organic food in the European context, within an overall framework of investigating consumer expectations, perceptions and actual buying behaviours towards organic and low input foods, thereby supporting the development and compatibility of such farming systems in line with consumer expectations.

The specific objectives of the qualitative studies of which this is a part are as follows: firstly, to understand the development of conceptions of organic food products and production methods; and secondly, to identify 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 & Foster, 2005) have drawn typologies of organic consumers from 'snapshots' at particular points in time. In contrast, this study is based on qualitative exploration of consumers' biographical narratives so that a more dynamic perspective on their behaviour can be developed. We have used in-depth interviews and direct ethnographic observation to allow us to explore Gardner's (2004) concept of 'changing minds'. His approach suggests that when someone undergoes a change of mind, this process usually involves concepts, stories, theories and skills. Our analysis identifies these elements in consumer narratives, helping to obtain deeper knowledge and understanding of consumption patterns. Gardner distinguishes seven 'levers' that may influence a change of mind: reasons (assessment of relevant factors), research (procurement of relevant data), resonance (the affective component), re-descriptions (mutually reinforcing images of what will result from the change), resources and rewards (perceived cost-benefit relationship), real world events (in households, markets, etc.) and resistances (to change). Dick and Basu (1994) have explored product loyalty, as repeated patronage, and identified three indicators of loyalty: the

likelihood that the consumer will search for alternatives, resistance to counter-persuasion, and word-of-mouth recommendation to others. Their contribution has also inspired our design and analysis.

1.3. Sample and method

This study was designed to obtain detailed in-depth qualitative interview data from consumers with a varying degree of commitment to purchasing organic food products. The sample in each country included three subgroups: regular, occasional and non-users of organic food products. Half were recruited from the London area, as the major metropolis in the UK, and half from Bristol, representing an average-sized city area. At least two cases were drawn from households comprising singles, young couples without children, families with younger children and older couples whose children no longer lived at home. A minimum inclusion of male participants was also imposed. Ethnographic accounts of the trajectories of food purchases and food consumption in the household were obtained to describe events that have influenced decisions. In each household, the person mainly responsible for food shopping decisions (the 'principal shopper') was recruited for an in-depth semi structured interview. The interview aimed to draw out a biographical narrative which detailed important events that influenced decisions relevant to food consumption. Validation of core interviews has come from the use of triangulating perspectives. In each case, an additional interview with a close family member or friend focused on the decisions of the principal shopper. Accompanied shopping trips were undertaken and observed, using audio or video-recording where consent was obtained, and some shopkeepers were also interviewed.

Recruitment and screening of potential principal shoppers varied between the two geographical locations. In London, recruitment of regular organic consumers was carried out at a small health food shop in Greenwich, a large supermarket in an out-of-centre retail park and at Spitalfields Market (an inner-city, high quality farmers' market). Recruiting non-consumers was attempted at a variety of locations in London, including a large supermarket, a discount supermarket, a suburban food market and a smaller suburban supermarket. Recruiting the non-principal shoppers proved to be very difficult, resulting in one less participant in this group than originally planned. In Bristol, recruitment of consumers was carried out at a central, weekly farmers' market, at a large supermarket and from referrals from others (for example, certain producers at the farmers' market suggested customers for interview). Table 1 provides details of all households which participated in the study.

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

1.4. 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 have been mostly driven by demand (Michelsen *et al.*, 2001). On the one hand, there was a series of widespread scandals involving food safety issues (for example, the suggestion in 1988 by Health Minister, Edwina Currie, that the majority of eggs in the UK was contaminated with salmonella;¹ also, most importantly, emerging concerns of possible links between Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and the human disease, vCJD: variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease). 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 increased

¹ Edwina Currie, then a controversial junior Health Minister, told reporters when being interviewed for television that "Most of the egg production in this country, sadly, is now affected with salmonella": see http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/3/newsid_2519000/2519451.stm.

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 the strong presence of multiples in the sector, which might have increased confidence, both for producers to convert to organic farming and for the consumer. These supermarket chains 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.

Table 1: Details of households interviewed and observations

<i>Code</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Secondary interview</i>	<i>Household composition</i>	<i>Location and filming of shopping trip</i>
R1	F	41	London	Husband (age 40)	Couple, children <11	No film obtained – time constraints
R2	F	33	Bristol	Husband (age 36)	Couple, children <11	Film of shopping in local Somerfield supermarket
R3	F	35	London	Husband (age 36)	Couple, children <11	Film of shopping at farmers market
R4	M	35	Bristol	Wife (age 35)	Couple, no children	No film obtained, but shopping trip observed
R5	M	35	London	Wife (age 35)	Couple, no children	Film of shopping at local precinct of shops
R6	F	39	London	Partner (45)	Couple, children left home	No film obtained – participant declined
R7	F	31	Bristol	Husband (age 31)	Couple, no children	Film of shopping at large Asda
R8	F	54	London	Close friend (35)	Female, children left home	Film of shopping at local Coop
R9	F	49	Bristol	Son (age 16)	Single, children 11>	No film obtained – shopping observed at farmers' market
O1	F	53	Bristol	n.a.	Couple, children <11	No film obtained – shopping observed at farmers' market
O2	M	35	Bristol	House-mate (age 32)	Single, no children	No film obtained – subject declined
O3	F	48	London	Husband (age 45)	Couple, children <11	Film of shopping at health food shop
O4	F	33	Bristol	Mother (age 65)	Couple, no children	Film of shopping at farmers' market
O5	F	33	London	n.a.	Young Couple, no children	No film obtained – subject declined
O6	M	62	London	Partner (61)	Couple, children left home	No film obtained – subject declined
O7	F	60	Bristol	Husband (63)	Couple, children left home	No film obtained – subject declined
O8	F	47	Bristol	Son (age 22)	Couple, children over 21	Shopping trip observed, audio recorded
O9	M	n.a.	Bristol	Son (age 17)	Couple, one child	Shopping trip observed, audio recorded
N1	M	30	London	n.a.	Single, no children	No film obtained – shopping observed
N2	F	46	Bristol	n.a.	Couple, children left home	No film obtained – subject declined
N3	M	32	Bristol	n.a.	Single, no children	No film obtained – subject too busy

* Code: R – regular consumer; O – occasional consumer; N – non-consumer. In text, -S refers to secondary interviewee

Unlike in 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 organic 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 EU 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 & 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 & Foster, 2006).

The statistics which describe the organic market in the UK 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 has published an annual Organic Market Report providing data 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 and, 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. The surge in area was partly due to the introduction of conversion aids for organic farmers in 1997 and, subsequently, their 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 UK 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, on one hand, the deficiency of dedicated processing capacity and, on the other, reluctance of multiple retailers to accord priority to purchasing domestic production. At this time, there was 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, the expansion of consumer demand as noted since the late 1990s has outstripped even the rapid extension of capacity. 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 but 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 dominant in 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% occurs through this channel (Soil Association, 2007). However, there has been strong recent growth in sales through independent shops (now 18%) and by producers (7%), reversing 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).

Chapter 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 food production and consumption in the future can link human with ecological health.

The role of food in contemporary society is of major significance; Lang and Heasman (2004) describe the conflicts, crises and inequalities of food trading and marketing within a highly politicised arena dominated by multinational conglomerates, and they describe the future of food as uncertain and unstable. This view articulates major challenges regarding the environmental sustainability of the food production system, and the quality and nutritional value of food produced.

Food habits relate to the main aspects of food culture. These include sourcing (shopping, service catering, or producing food from household resources), food preparation, cooking, and the negotiation and dynamics of meals and eating. Current food habits can be understood in relation to a person's food history, previous habits, events, and lifecycle changes that have influenced present norms. It is of particular interest to identify how the food habits of regular consumers of organic food have changed over time, and to compare them to those of occasional and non-consumers, in order to gain insights into understanding future organic consumption habits.

2.1. Current food habits

Consumers who can be described as 'food-engaged' were recruited for this study. Consequently, regular, occasional, and non-consumers' narratives showed that tasty food of good quality is something to which all currently pay attention and attach great importance. Each household had their own distinctive food values and food culture. Almost all consumers' food biographies recounted a change from 'traditional' food habits of the past to, diversely influenced, contemporary food habits of the current period.

2.1.1. Shopping habits

Narratives from all three consumer groups suggested that food shopping was an activity which involved thoughtful negotiation.

I guess shopping is something that is more than just functional but we think about it and enjoy it. (R2)

Regular organic consumers

Shopping locations

Shopping habits of our sample of consumers were often creative and resourceful. With an abundance of choice of shopping venues in both London and Bristol, shopping locations and general shopping habits varied considerably across the different lifecycle phases represented in the interviewees.

Major differences between regular consumers with regard to current shopping habits were characterised by variations in the shopping venues chosen and differing values associated with the shopping experience. Interviews revealed two subsets of regular consumers regarding shopping habits. One group of 'alternatively-orientated' shoppers sought to source their food from a variety of alternatives to supermarket locations, whereas 'supermarket-orientated' consumers preferred to shop in mainstream supermarkets.

The first subset expressed preferences for shopping in specialist or alternative locations such as health food shops and farmers' markets, to gain a more personal shopping experience, access an extensive range of organic goods and receive a degree of expert food product knowledge. While they all acknowledged a need to shop in supermarkets to source specific items, what distinguished them from the second subset of consumers was a common attitude of resistance to supermarkets, a self-imposed challenge to popular conventional shopping behaviour, and a view that alternative shopping arenas were 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. (R9)

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. (R2)

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. (R5)

The positive experience of shopping in smaller, more personal locations was often reinforced by a dislike and mistrust of larger multiple retailers.

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. (R2-S)

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'. (R2)

Some narratives also featured 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. (R9)

It was often the overall experience of shopping in alternative environments that included the aesthetic experience, as well as personal contact and trust in quality and production methods. Supermarkets were spoken about with genuinely negative emotion by some alternatively-orientated regular organic consumers.

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. (R8)

These consumers regarded the realm of the supermarket as an inauthentic location for sourcing organic food. Although necessity drove even the alternatively-orientated regular consumers to use supermarkets on occasions, distrust of supermarkets was common. This suspicion can be seen as an element of an anti-commercial attitude and opposition to market power. Allied with this was a rejection of conventional branding, excessive packaging, aggressive marketing, and advertising.

In contrast, the second subset of consumers (the supermarket-orientated) articulated practical reasons for shopping at supermarkets, and did not mention any ideals 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 [partner's name] 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. (R7-S)

It is between Waitrose, Marks and Spencer's and Sainsbury's. It was always Waitrose, then when [partner's name] moved in we started going to Sainsbury's as well because he likes the branded products that he can get in Sainsbury's (R6)

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. (R6-S)

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... (R1)

The distinguishing characteristic of the second subset of consumers was that they appeared to have accepted and, in some cases, embraced the supermarket as a necessary shopping location. Their narratives did not strongly feature negative reflections about supermarkets, nor did they express desires to shop in alternative contexts. This tended to be associated with a view of shopping as a practical chore rather than a leisure pursuit.

I am a lazy shopper in Asda. I would want to get it over and done with. (R7-S)

Trust

For most regular consumers interviewed, there was an implication that trust was one of the most important concerns when shopping for food. For some, trust in a food retailer provided the desired reassurance. Supermarket-orientated consumers experienced trust within the reliable context of a supermarket.

I trust Waitrose and Marks and Spencer's. Not too sure about Sainsbury's, just not too sure. (R6)

Lack of trust in certain supermarkets was 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 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. (R3)

Even though this story related to food produced to organic standards, additional values and expectations about what organic food should actually be do not conform. The implication was that organic food from the supermarket context cannot easily be trusted in the same way that organic food from a smaller producer can, and that there was a clear dichotomy between ideas based on preferences for small-scale producers and for mainstream, corporate retail suppliers.

Trust featured as a major value in stories about shopping in locations where there was 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... (R4)

Trust was 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 was tied up with ethical concerns and traceability. Relevant information, at an informal level, was

often perceived as being easier to access within the context of a smaller shop than in a large supermarket chain.

I don't know if ethical is the right word, but in terms of [partner's name] 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. (R5)

In cases where, of necessity, alternatively-orientated regular consumers had to shop in a supermarket, the choice often depended on which supermarket was most trusted.

I have a Co-op 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. (R9)

To some extent, issues of trust and mistrust were related to consumers' differing attitudes towards shopping locations. The subset of regular, alternatively-orientated consumers lacked trust in large supermarkets because they suspected that such companies operate in a way in which people and the environment matter less than the motive for making profit. Also, the experience was anonymous and so there was little opportunity to ask important questions about food. Smaller shopping locations, affording direct contact with a producer or supplier, were favoured because there was more opportunity to gain information. In contrast, some consumers from the supermarket-orientated subset had trust, in their supermarkets of choice, which often related to direct experiences of reliability, consistency of produce and branding that features messages about company ethics and food sourcing policies.

For other supermarket-orientated regular consumers, trust in organic food featured 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. (R7-S)

Price

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

One alternatively-orientated regular consumer suggested that spending more than is necessary on food might be perceived as an extravagance, but offered a justification for the higher costs of organic food consumption in terms of lifestyle; for example, money was saved in other areas (for example, not taking holidays or buying unhealthy snack foods, or not going out and drinking alcohol); organic food choices were not practiced to make a pretentious 'statement'. This consumer selected organic items which were believed to deserve a premium, while excluding others deemed not worth the higher cost. This self-conscious attempt to avoid being seen as a conspicuous consumer, swayed by popular advertising, could 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 indicated that substantial thought was put into weighing up financial considerations for buying organic food.

According to Gardner (2004) 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, leading to a conviction that a favourable decision is being made.

Other alternatively-orientated regular consumers in this study also selected organic products they felt worth the premium, and were often acutely aware of the price of certain organic foods; price was central to whether or not a particular product was 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. (R9)

Most of the supermarket-orientated regular consumers interviewed accepted the price premium for organic food and price was not an obvious issue. In one exceptional case where it was a significant factor in decisions about food shopping, the interviewee chose to shop at a supermarket specifically to pay lower prices and find the best value for money. This consumer had a large family, four children under 10 years of age, supported solely by one full-time income but, most significantly, had experienced cancer which had heightened awareness of certain potentially high-risk foods. Organic food habits were therefore adopted specifically for such foods.

Within the regular consumer group, some had exceptionally high levels of organic purchasing; hereafter these are described as 'dedicated' organic consumers. This subset had established a rationale in support of the cost of their organic food habits, which related 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. (R5)

Some dedicated regular consumers commented that they did not consciously look at prices because other factors, such as trust, overrode price. In such cases, income levels were relatively high (often two full-time working professionals in a household with no dependants) and the food budget was 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 ... (R6)

Occasional organic consumers

Shopping locations

Occasional consumers in this study also varied in preferred shopping locations and again it was possible to identify two distinct subsets: alternatively-orientated and supermarket-orientated occasional consumers.

Occasional, alternatively-orientated consumers were similar to the corresponding subset of regular consumers, in that they also preferred to avoid busy anonymous supermarkets and would spend time sourcing ingredients from a variety of specialist locations. Again, a value was 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. (O4)

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 okay 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. (O5)

Supermarket-orientated occasional consumers, especially those with busy family lives, tended to shop for the majority of their food in supermarkets. These were often convenient locations in close proximity to their home, or chosen because where they could shop was restricted by where they lived, so chosen for convenience.

I never had any time, so it had to be half an hour grabbed here, and I had a very clear idea what I was going in for. Go in, it's only now that I have any time, but I just, I so much don't really want to do it. There are other things I'd rather be doing. (O7)

They were well-educated and socially and environmentally conscious. However, some supermarket-orientated occasional consumers would opt to buy their organic food items from 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's – but we know it's nice and good. (O1)

This suggested that motivation for consuming occasional food products from outlets close to the source of production related to quality and taste. The aspect of 'localness' was also conveyed as an additional reason for consuming from such locations.

Trust

Occasional consumers, like regular consumers, made shopping decisions based on trust. Trust in the producer also featured as an important factor in the shopping decision. One way trust might be experienced was through buying direct from the source of production. Direct food purchases might not specifically be organic, they might be locally produced or free range, but the same rationale of experiencing direct contact with a producer applied. This was more common among alternatively-orientated occasional consumers.

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's why I don't like going to the supermarkets. I find them very impersonal. They're slightly stressful and a bit depressing really. (O4)

What distinguished most occasional from regular consumers was that they said they did not source food specifically because it is organic. A degree of scepticism about organic products and the organic label was conveyed by many of the occasional consumers. This scepticism could be linked to a desire to explicitly resist being a conspicuous consumer, and also the feeling that organic was somehow a confidence trick played by a commercial organic sector that was little understood, let alone trusted.

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. (O5)

The majority of occasional consumers saw the organic label as tainted by profiteering, which appeared as somehow out of line with their expectations of 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 appeared to be in opposition to the expected and imagined values of 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. (O1)

The insight that organic food products might not conform to expected ideals aroused suspicion about the whole organic industry and the image of organic food became more associated with commercial business.

In some instances, the main means by which occasional consumers resisted mainstream food culture was through buying locally-produced food. Local food sourced direct from a producer offered

traceability and trust, as well as faith in an ability to practice sustainable consumption. Such food may just happen to be organic as well as local.

Additionally, occasional consumers might have bought free range products which also just happened to be organic; or food-allergy-friendly products which were wheat free and dairy free and, again, were organic.

Price

Price featured in narratives of occasional consumers as an important consideration for food choices. While regular consumers explicitly accepted the fact that organic produce costs more, occasional consumers were less convinced by the justification for price differentials for organic goods, and this was more likely to be a stumbling block which deterred occasional consumers from increasing organic consumption.

Most occasional consumers said that organic food was expensive, and they were often influenced by lower non-organic 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. (O4)

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. (O5)

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. (O2)

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. (O5)

Some, however, were not concerned by price directly, although had a clear value-for-money criterion.

Well, I'm not price sensitive if I want something, because I don't have to be any more. So if I want something that's what I want, okay, you're going to have to pay for it. But on the other hand there is a bit of me that wants value for money, and if there are two things that look identical but they've got different names on them, then obviously there is a point at which I think well, it's not worth paying extra for that. (O7)

Well, he is now a lot more affluent than he used to be; he came from quite a poor background, so I think that now he has the freedom. I think that there are some people who are rich from the start, and rich at the end, and when they're rich, and they're, they can almost afford to be outlandish all the way. And perhaps, I think my dad sees it maybe as an unnecessary expense to buy organic food. And also he, although he doesn't know it, subconsciously he's probably comparing it to things when he was younger, because that's how he associates the cost of everything. (O9-S)

Occasional consumers recognised that it was worth paying more for some organic products, in particular for eggs and dairy products. This was 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. (O6)

Reluctance to systematically buy more organic products related to issues of price and availability, and also to the scepticism that some occasional consumers had towards 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. (O6)

Non-organic consumers

Non-consumer narratives indicated that shopping habits were not a reflection of lack of interest in, or engagement with, issues surrounding food, but of lack of financial resources and incentives to make organic food purchases. Shopping habits of non-consumers were 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. (N3)

Cost was the most important factor for this group of consumers when food shopping. There appeared to be a desire to be thrifty with regard to food. This might not have been because the non-consumer's income level was any lower than those of regular and occasional consumers, but spending on food was less due to different priorities and values, and a perceived lack of evidence and of trust that organic food is worth paying more for.

Shopping locations

Unlike regular and occasional consumers, non-consumers in this study did not consist of subsets of alternatively-orientated and supermarket-orientated consumers. All the non-consumers interviewed shopped mainly in supermarkets, but would also buy items in other smaller locations. Large supermarkets tended to be visited routinely, while small groceries were 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. (N1)

Shopping locations were often chosen for convenience and cost benefits, as a result of established habits, and for access to particular specialist ingredients.

However, non-consumers' narratives, in line with the alternatively-orientated regular and occasional consumers, featured criticisms of the anonymous supermarket environment. They indicated that they would shop in these locations for convenience and cost benefits, but also suggested that they preferred 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. (N2)

However, the constraints of contemporary life impose barriers to this kind of shopping and, in practice, non-consumers would not make a strenuous effort to shop in this way.

Trust

Non-consumers' attitudes with regard to trust in food were similar to those of occasional consumers. Non-consumers differed from regular consumers, whose trust was articulated through beliefs about the superior safety and quality of organic food, compared with conventional produce.

Non-consumers, in contrast, expressed lack of trust in organic food items on the premise that they did not have substantive knowledge and convincing evidence about the benefits. They had a general mistrust of companies and supermarkets that produced and marketed organic products for profit-making purposes.

I don't understand the basic economics of it....I think that someone is making money from it especially now that the big supermarkets are so heavily involved...I really don't want to buy into that...(N3)

Price

Whether it was shopping spontaneously to buy best value deals when available or deliberately sourcing best value after longstanding assessment of comparative prices, the main motivation for non-consumers interviewed was value for money.

But obviously...time and money are the two central factors in governing my shopping habits I would say. (N1)

Organic food was described as an expensive luxury: premium-priced, pretentious products that were not for everyday consumption. By rejecting organic food as a branded, fashionable fad, non-consumers conveyed their immunity to marketing trends, and the firm values that they held. Principles of organic farming were seen as favourable but the practice was not fully understood, and was not trusted in terms of justifying the higher, less-affordable cost.

2.1.2. Cooking

Cooking and food preparation habits varied in practice across the three groups, household sizes and lifecycle phases. However, stories about cooking revealed that, for all interviewees, there was a common aim of home-made, tasty, food.

Yeah I really enjoy cooking, just cooking at home and I think if you cook you enjoy your food more. (R9)

In many households, cooking was an activity that was enjoyed the most at weekends when time was less of a constraint, and some household members told 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 [partner's name] children come to stay and we do a roast dinner on a Sunday. That's our little ritual. (R6)

Those with children were less likely to speak about their own enjoyment of cooking and were more likely to be considering the eating needs of family members.

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 it's pretty frustrating sometimes. (R6)

Not all were enthusiasts, however.

Some people just adore cooking don't they, I'm not that sort of cook, it's just that I'm aware that your food is the fuel and has to be sensible ... I don't add herbs and spices and spend hours in the kitchen, that's not my sort of cooking at all. (O7)

It appeared that enjoyment was enhanced at a later lifecycle phase, when cooking could be for leisure and there were fewer of the 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. (R8)

A small proportion of interviewees from the regular and occasional groups enthused about the activity of cooking, but all the non-consumers were enthusiastic – generally devoting time to thinking about recipes and experimenting with food. Stories gave details about favourite recipes; others mentioned more elaborate recipes tried out more recently for the first time. Those with a high degree of passion for quality of life issues, family values and a commitment to being responsible citizen consumers were also likely to place value on cooking and mealtimes as being a positive and important aspect of family life.

I'm a big 'we-sit-down-together-for-food-if-we-possibly-can person'. (R5)

Single consumers interviewed mentioned the importance of the communal aspect of meals.

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. (N1)

This suggested that eating home-cooked food was a privilege and symbolised an emotional sense of wellbeing. Home-cooked food, eaten communally, was contrasted with individualistic and alienating, modern convenience food from a jar or tin, often eaten in isolation. Rejection of ready meals and processed food accompanied the view that cooking was a favourable activity, because it allowed a level of control over what goes into a meal.

I like cooking...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. (N2)

There was no evidence that regular consumers were more likely to cook than those in the other two consumer groups. Nor was there evidence that there was more emphasis on cooking healthy food by regular consumers, when compared with the two other groups. When regular consumers spoke about cooking and ingredients, they generally did not mention organic food.

However, the concept of what constituted a healthy meal differed between non-consumers and most regular consumers, and to some extent there was also a conceptual distinction between regular and occasional consumers.

Non-consumers were less well-informed about healthy eating practices, tending towards sweeping generalisations about anything home-cooked being healthy irrespective of the ingredients used and methods of preparation. They were not, therefore, explicitly health conscious and, in contrast to regular consumers, did not have explicit aspirations to eat a 'healthy' diet.

2.1.3. Mealtimes and eating habits

Mealtimes played an important role in everyday life, regardless of consumer type or lifecycle phase of interviewee. While the overall consensus was that meals were an important aspect of everyday life, there were differences between single people and families in the practice and negotiation of mealtimes, with different patterns of sharing and eating dynamics. The families interviewed tended to place more emphasis on the planning of meals. They had established traditions of communal eating, such as the family-orientated event of the Sunday roast or Christmas dinner (often cooked by the husband as a one-off significant gesture). Communal eating was very much a recreational pursuit and was appreciated as an aspect of the quality of family life. While the single people interviewed still clearly valued the experience of eating communally, whether living alone or in shared households, they spoke more about eating out or cooking for friends.

Across all three consumer groups, narratives suggested that interviewees made a distinction between traditional food and contemporary food, which was often inspired by other national cuisines. This indicated that food habits have changed because of cultural influences (such as migration patterns), advertising, a broader range of available ingredients, and popular media influences such as cookery programmes. The traditional form of a meal in Britain was one that consisted of meat, potatoes and vegetables – most commonly referred to ‘as meat and two vegetables’. This transition from traditional to contemporary food will be examined in further detail in section 3 below.

Regular organic consumers

The views of regular organic food consumers about what constitutes a meal differed from case to case. Some expressed enthusiasm for good, simple, wholesome food (in line with more traditional British meals), while others told stories about cooking more complex (and time-consuming) meals, such as Mexican chilli or Indian curry. All the regular consumers interviewed ascribed a value to meals that are healthy and home-cooked, and most of these households sat down communally for a meal every day. One common feature of these meals was that they normally include fresh vegetables and fruit.

Good vegetables, I suppose, and fruit form a major part of it. (R4)

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... (R1)

For most of the regular consumers interviewed, this vegetable and fruit component in meals, and indeed the overall diet, was directly related to associated health benefits. Some even admitted that enjoyment was not always a feature and that eating fruit was practiced in order to be healthy.

Fruit, probably, I see fruit as a very important bit, but I'm the worst in the house at eating fruit. I'll buy a bowlful, I'll eat it once or twice a week, while the others will eat two pieces of fruit every day; they take two pieces with them to work. So while I see it, I don't always practice it. (R4)

In terms of traditional food, there was a subset of regular consumers who adhered to traditional conventions of the past, cooking food in line with the ‘meat and two vegetables’ concept.

Yes, my son has a cooked meal every evening. I try and have at least two veg and potatoes and some organic meat. (R9)

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. It's not fussy; it's really simple. (R6)

Other regular consumers made plain in their narratives that they had left the traditional food of their parent's generation behind and cooked more adventurously, often with influence from recipes and ingredients from other countries.

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. (R7)

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. (R8)

Occasional organic consumers

Although most occasional consumers interviewed preferred the traditional British concept of meals consisting of meat and two vegetables, some were more adventurous. A few narratives indicated

strong adherence to this tradition, but others were richly diverse in terms of both cuisines and ingredients.

We would have a typical kind of meat and two veg dinner because I am at home; I cook something like that every night. (O3)

A balanced meal, a nutritious meal. An attractive and tasty meal, and usually three courses. (O7)

Evening meal cooked at home, that would tend to be, well something like spaghetti bolognese or shepherd's pie, will tend to be meat and two veg, or fish and two veg of some description, takeaways occasionally. Weekends, normally a roast on a Sunday. (O9)

There were some occasional consumers who cooked more experimentally, and they described cooking food influenced by cuisines and flavours from other nations, such as North African, Italian, Greek and Indian. Nevertheless, consumers from the latter group shared the belief that communal mealtimes had important value in 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... (O5)

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. (O1)

My husband's still working and it's nice that he comes in at night, and we sit down and we have a meal, and we chat and talk about the day, and that's part of our lifestyle. (O7)

Much like regular consumers, this group also showed concern for eating balanced, healthy meals and were conscious of the health benefits of eating fresh fruit and vegetables.

...and a vegetable constituent... I like to have a large portion of vegetables. (O4)

In terms of balance it is really important the kids know about fresh fruit and vegetables. (O1)

I've always bought lots of fruit, the boys, and my husband is a tremendous fruit eater, loads of fruit. I think you'd be amazed at the amount of fruit we get through in a week. (O7)

It was important for this group that ingredients were fresh and of good quality, and for many, local origin and seasonality of produce were also mentioned as important.

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. (O1)

Non-organic consumers

This group shared a common approach and conceptual references to what constituted a proper meal. While not all of them sat down for a communal meal every night, they did ascribe a high value to home-cooked meals. In common with the regular and occasional consumers interviewed, this group also expressed some preference for fresh unprocessed foods and mentioned the importance of a diet that includes fresh fruit and vegetables. However, as already noted, they expressed 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. (N1)

[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 craggy 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. (N2)

I think good food is food which has had minimal processes...and has been cooked using the freshest ingredients... (N3)

The non-organic consumers interviewed also talked about preference for seasonal produce and aspired to shop seasonally, although they admitted that this was sometimes difficult and not what they always were able to manage in 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. (N1)

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 ... I usually go for locally grown but I do buy New Zealand Braeburn apples, and bananas we buy. (N2)

Meals prepared and eaten by non-organic consumers interviewed ranged from traditional, typical English food such as roast beef with Yorkshire pudding and the English cooked breakfast, to salt cod from Jamaica, a range of recipes from Iran, Mexico and India and also Italian pasta dishes. Innovation in cooking was 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 friend's 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 friend's 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 [it]. (N1)

All principal shoppers in this group experimented with food from other cuisines as well as cooking more traditional British food. Direct influence from friends did not always feature; other influences included advertising and promotion in supermarkets, and television. In comparison to their parents, there had been a clear change in what constitutes a meal for the current generation of consumers.

There is still a huge difference between what my parents have and what we have here. We have home-made 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. (N2)

2.1.4. Lunchtime food habits

Interestingly all interviewees acted differently at lunchtime compared with when they were at home. At lunchtime, many ate out at a work canteen or a café close to their workplace. A small proportion from each group prepared lunch to take to work or returned home to eat, which was a means to save money in some cases. In others, it was because they wanted to eat home-cooked food at lunchtime as well. What was striking about most narrative accounts of lunchtime habits was the suspension of food rules for this meal. Only very dedicated organic consumers actually made an effort to source a healthy organic lunch. Otherwise, interviewees knew very little about the origin of the food they were consuming during this meal. This was accepted as normal in relation to working life. Acknowledging this suspension of food rules during lunchtimes, one interviewee complained of poor quality food and the generally unsatisfying experience of lunchtimes.

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 ... (O3)

2.2. The initial encounter with organic foods

The initial encounter with organic food is something that many interviewees, regardless of affinity to organic food, found difficult to recall with clarity. There were two exceptions. The first involved a farm visit which had made 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. (R5)

The second exception (also a regular organic food consumer) was of Canadian origin. He recalled beginning to purchase organic food when looking for a specific, popular Canadian product (peanut butter); the best and closest in quality to the authentic Canadian variety just happened to be organic. Here, the story was of searching for a familiar taste where there was an emotional link with 'home' and the comfort that this brings. Through this process, the discovery of an organic product subsequently led the household to become regular consumers of other organic food items.

Most other regular consumers tended not to remember the exact moment when organic consumption commenced. Normally, it had occurred well in the past, and there were no stories about first encounters that were relatively recent. Stories about first encounters tended to relate to either major events that had brought about the change or to details of products likely to have been purchased. For some, it was lifecycle transition (such as securing a better-paid job) which made organic products more affordable, or the experience of serious illness which brought about renewed interest in food and health.

One occasional consumer's story about early memories of organic food, ten years in the past, revealed disappointment. She assumed that organic eggs would come from chickens that wandered around and that they would therefore taste better, but she was disappointed to experience that *organic eggs don't taste fantastic (O1)*.

Generally, narratives of regular consumers suggested that the first conscious motivation to try organic food occurred because of linked concepts of personal benefits in terms of health, quality, safety and taste.

This absence of strong memories about first encounters with organic food itself provided an important insight. The lack of recall suggested that, because organic food has been around for a long time, its absorption into consumption patterns has blended in with everyday habits. This corresponds to the notion that organic food habits have mostly been adopted gradually over a period of time, rather than abruptly as a direct response to an identifiable trigger.

2.3. Changes in food habits

Food often only began to become important, and decisions about food to play a more relevant role in everyday life, when a relative degree of settling down took place as a result of lifestyle transition. Examples included living independently as a young professional, living with a partner, getting married or having children.

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. (R6)

2.3.1. Childhood food

Understanding changes in food habits can be facilitated by descriptions of former food habits, especially those which feature memories of childhood food. Childhood food clearly played a significant role in influencing adult food habits, either due to fond memories which encouraged adulthood imitation of fresh, tasty, home- 'cooked from scratch' meals, or unfavourable memories which triggered 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. (R5)

Many of the regular consumers interviewed recalled memories of the traditional food of their childhood to illustrate the differences between how their parents cooked and how they currently cooked themselves.

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... (R5)

Although stories often featured fond memories of good home-cooked food, familiar traditional recipes cooked by a parent (generally a mother) and happy stories of family mealtimes, it was unlikely that the same pattern of food preparation occurred in adulthood. But where recipes did not survive, food preferences for fresh ingredients, rejection of processed food, and willingness to put effort into meal preparation had been passed on. The desire to eat together as a family also remained, but a significant change for a number of regular consumers (reflected in occasional and non-consumer narratives as well) was that 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.

My mum actually made home-made food nearly every day...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. (R7)

Childhood food was generally remembered as 'traditional'. Some regular consumers recollected recipes that lacked adventure and health consciousness, contrasting with a period of discovery when more exciting, healthier cuisine was encountered during their own early adulthood. Healthy eating was one factor that often prompted changes towards organic purchasing and, in turn, opened up further appreciation of new foods, new recipes and broader food awareness.

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. (R7)

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. (R5)

There were some exceptions; a number of regular consumers remembered home-grown, home-made and healthy foods eaten in their childhood.

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 [partner's name] 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... (R2)

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. (R9)

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... (R3)

Some traditional cooking practices experienced during childhood were recalled as opportunities to learn from, and to cherish, in adulthood.

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. (R8)

Occasional organic consumers

This group's recollection of childhood food paralleled the nostalgia found in regular consumers' accounts. Memories of similar kinds of traditional foods, that would have been eaten often, contrast starkly with foods currently eaten. The majority remembered their childhood foods as traditional British dishes which would not be considered particularly healthy now.

I do remember enjoying home-baked food, shepherds pie, toad in the hole². (O5)

It was tomato sauce sandwiches, rice crispies and spaghetti bolognese (O2)

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. (O3)

There were two cases where, exceptionally and with genuine fondness, childhood food was remembered as healthy.

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. (O1)

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. (O6)

Non-organic consumers

² "Toad in the hole" consists of British-style sausages cooked in batter in an oven.

Most non-consumers interviewed also recalled positive memories of traditional food from their childhood. One, however, had rather negative memories featuring bland, unimaginative, over-cooked and stodgy food. The others vividly and favourably described the traditional food they would have eaten, in one instance involving home-grown vegetables, but which otherwise was 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 lunchtime. He used to press his own hams and tongues so everything was good natural food. (N1)

This group changed their eating habits quite dramatically in adulthood; the one interviewee whose memories were particularly disappointing had completely rejected the kind of food he ate as a child. All non-consumers had adopted broader, less traditional and more eclectic food habits in adulthood.

2.3.2. School dinners

Other significant factors in the development of adult food habits revolved around memories of foods experienced outside the family home, particularly school dinners. Memories of school dinners do not differ between consumer groups, and tended to trigger extreme feelings and unpleasant sensations which might have played a part in influencing notions about what constitutes good and bad food.

Such memories, then, rarely featured tasty, healthy food.

...it was fish in batter, horrible fatty meat and the vegetables over cooked and disgusting, all watery. (R9)

Yeah really ... unhealthy puddings. semolina and tapioca and all the things that [name] really laughs at, like my pet hates... (R6)

2.3.3. Student food habits

The experience of eating unpleasant school dinners did not necessarily spur young adults to adopt better food habits during student years. However, it appeared that during this lifecycle stage, development of adulthood preferences was established. Across all three consumer groups, memories of food during student and early adulthood years were generally characterised by lack of specific interest in food, since other aspects of social life took on overriding importance, and time for extensive preparation was scarce. Even so, during post-school years some of the interviewees suggested that they developed greater food awareness, were exposed to more varieties of food, and hinted that some of the foundations for future orientation towards organic food were laid.

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. (R9)

Food, as an important value consideration in everyday life, appeared to be of less consequence for the young single student, partly due to financial constraints, partly the living arrangements of shared households, and also the preference for other cultural pursuits. However, during the latter years of student life, food did feature in many narrative accounts as an activity that involved individuals cooking with friends, and the sense of value for home-cooked food and the experience of sharing a meal emerged.

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. (O4)

Habits during early adulthood, especially student years, tended not to differ particularly between consumer groups. Even those with a strong passion for food and organic sourcing in adulthood recalled their habits during this period as driven by convenience and a restricted 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. (R6)

I used to shop at the local Somerfield: it was loads of pasta, curries, usual student staples. (R7)

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? (R9)

I was in various lodgings with landladies that provided a breakfast and evening meal. I think then the breakfasts were cooked, the evening meals provided, lunchtime tended [to be] whatever the college refectory was offering. Cornish pasties featured largely I seem to remember, whatever was on offer. (O9)

Whereas the majority of consumers did not recall any orientation towards organic food during their student years, two consumers (one regular, one occasional) did suggest that they had 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. (R2)

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. (O5)

2.3.4. Established adulthood food habits

The most significant changes in food habits were reported to occur after student years, when a more stable and secure daily life was generally reported. Narratives of regular consumers tended to draw a link between entering full adulthood and the security and freedom this brings. They reported this as the beginning of shopping in a more liberated way.

When we first moved to Bristol as we were both on very low salaries, 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. (R7)

In this case, preferences which may have begun to develop during student years could be practiced without restriction, once a change in resources occurred. However, the student mindset of cost minimisation was difficult to shift, as one regular consumer recounts.

I think for a while I still had that student mentality where you don't spend much money on food. (R2)

Resources also relate to elements of access to, and the availability of, 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. (R7)

Sometimes, changes in food habits occurred when adopting a new role; for example, the experience of 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. (N2)

Having children also triggered definite food changes.

I think the point when it changed was when we first had children, when I had to start feeding other people. (O1)

The same was true after children left home and significant pressures were removed from household budgets.

I shop at Marks and Spencer's quite a lot and I just enjoy the fact I can go in there and just walk down the shelves and take anything I like the look of, and think: oh, that will be nice for dinner one day and that will be okay for Saturday. It's tremendously liberating, it must be for anybody who's responsible for putting food on the table. (O7)

2.3.5. Influences on changing food habits

Food habits of consumers from all three groups were often reported to have changed because of the influence of a significant event or person.

Health and illness

Health consciousness had a strong influence on food habits. Narratives included 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... (O5)

Events relating to health which triggered changes in food habits and more acute awareness of food included the onset of diet-related illness, often caused by reported stress, which was associated with food allergies and intolerance by interviewees. In many cases, regular consumers of organic food reported direct experience of food-related illness, where either a partner or other family member had developed symptoms that brought the whole subject of diet into doubt and triggered a change (often radical) in food habits.

In my early 20's, I travelled a lot and [I] 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. [It] Made me think about what I eat. (R6)

This negative experience of stress and its relationship with diet often triggered a greater interest in food among interviewees, and concerns for health would then lead to the purchase of organic food products.

Major life events, for example a diagnosis of the disease of breast cancer, could have a profound influence on food habits and, in particular, on the decision to begin eating certain organic foods (especially dairy products). One regular consumer cited concerns regarding the relationship between non-organic milk and the presence of pesticide residues to justify their decision to consume only organic dairy products.

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. (R1)

Pregnancy

Changes in food habits were also reported to be influenced by pregnancy and the birth of a baby; this often initiated a new relationship with food, a more refined sense of health consciousness, and extra care being taken to ensure 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 [partner's name] became very conscious of what she was eating. (R1)

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. (R3)

The evidence from these narratives suggested that this change in lifecycle brought about a deeper, more conscious consideration for personal health as well as for the health of the interviewee's immediate family. There was 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 regular 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.

I want to buy what you feel is best for your children and I view giving them organic milk is better than non organic. You just sort of want to do everything right and let them make their own decisions when they are older. (R2)

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

But I think to be perfectly honest it didn't really kick off until [name] was born, because once you have a little tiny baby you really do not want to contaminate their body and you try harder. (O3)

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. (O1)

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. (N2)

Friends and family

Other influences which have had an impact on the food habits of regular consumers of organic food were personal in nature: the stimulus from friends or family who were also organic consumers.

Close friends, colleagues and family member were 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. (R7)

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. (R2)

My brother-in-law is really into food and he said you want the best you can get, the best chicken you can get, is an organic free range one. So that's why I would have bought organic free range chicken, and eggs, probably. (O8)

The professional work context, where many ideas circulate and knowledge is exchanged, was reported as an important influence on consumers' food habits, especially where the profession in question was relevant to subjects concerned with sustainability, nutrition or the environment. Many regular consumers who were engaged with the issues surrounding organic food discussed relevant concerns within the forum provided by the work context, or had a partner who worked in such a field. This professional network may not only be a source of social capital, where new avenues for consumption practice are acquired and exchanged, but can also reinforce views about the benefits of organic food.

Interestingly, the development of common identifications within social networks could lead to the adoption of like-minded opinions and behavioural habits about the environment, and relating to issues concerning organic food. For example, there was a subset of regular consumers within our sample who spoke about growing their own food on allotments. Influence could be reported as indirect and subtle, and occurred because there was a feeling of affiliation and identification with a person or group. A culmination of such influences over time could lead to the development of organic food purchase and consumption habits. These influences from friends and family suggesting the health benefits of organic food featured in several cases.

I remember when people were first talking about organic, it was on the news. I remember my parents talking about it and [partner'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. (O5)

I guess a mixture partly upbringing, the friends I mix with, reading the paper, watching news and [partner's name] as well and his job and the things he's interested in and being a mum you care more about what things are. (R2)

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. (O2)

My mum was at the forefront and she pointed out the Soil Association was in Bristol, and that was in the mid-90s, and I started to read about it and get interested. (R9)

Influences often came directly from other family members and often partners commented that they had been influenced by their spouses. Recent co-habitation brought a new set of influences and had involved formation of shared food habits.

Yeah certainly since I moved in... More when I've moved in...I now form part of the same shopping and purchasing patterns with [partner's name], prior to that I was on my own and still doing what I used to do before (R6)

The role of the expert as an influence

Experts were cited as sources of influence by regular consumers interviewed, especially for insights into matters of health and nutrition, food safety and security. For example,

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. (R1)

Food scandals had been prominently documented (even sensationalised) in the UK media, particularly BSE. Such media sources had also been reported as an influence on changing food habits. The BSE crisis, for example, 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. A more dated but still resonant case mentioned concerned the presence of salmonella bacteria in eggs. This scandal was 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.

I remember my mum was eating beef. I remember being very shocked and worried about it in relation to my family. And the eggs scandal and Edwina Currie was worrying too, although we aren't a particularly egg-eating family. (R8-S)

I didn't buy anything like that and I was a bit wary at that point and, in fact, I did buy some organic beef... I did stop buying beef burgers and things like that, the obvious things. (O7)

Television programmes, documentaries and books about food, as well as articles in specialist publications and the everyday press all featured in explanations of influences on changing food choices; these will be examined in further detail in section 2 of chapter 5.

2.4. Conclusion: the place of organic consumption in changing food habits

One major objective of our investigation was to seek patterns in the shopping habits, life histories, reference group influences, and lifecycle phases which contribute to a rationale (or rationales) within the narratives for organic food preferences. Our selection criteria and screening process were designed to select interviewees who were 'food-engaged' and, as a result, all of the interview transcripts displayed rich and distinct food habits. These were reported to have developed over distinct lifecycle phases, generally guided by parents during formative years. There was little differentiation between our regular, occasional and non-organic purchasers with regard to why they were food-engaged and, for all, there were strong indications that it related directly to early family life, values and experience.

Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1996) stressed the role of commodities as communicators; consequently, we might expect regular consumers to have aspired to be more food-conscious, and more concerned with eating fresh unprocessed food than occasional and non-consumers. This was not entirely reflected in our interviewees' narratives, since consumers from all three groups had aspirations to eat a healthy diet of mainly home-made meals with a generous portion of fresh vegetables and fruit. There were, however, differences in the interpretations and understandings about what constituted a 'healthy meal' which may be a basis for differentiating the consumer groups. Also, there appeared to be more conscious healthy eating practice among regular and occasional consumers, in comparison to non-consumers. However, very few narratives featured stories about eating highly processed or convenience foods; where these did feature, they were reported as occasional and an exception to normal food habits.

On the other hand, there were distinct differences within and between groups in the ways that food was sourced, namely shopping habits. Within both regular and occasional consumers, two subsets of alternatively-orientated and supermarket-orientated consumers were identified as having different attitudes, values and practices relating to food shopping. Non-consumers could not be easily assigned to such subsets, as they had a more eclectic approach to shopping. Thus, at the stage of food sourcing, food habits differed; once food was sourced, similar patterns appeared within the

context of cooking and meals within the household. Also, all three groups displayed a common ideal for naturally-produced food, grown free from chemicals.

A key difference which emerged from the narratives of regular consumers was the knowledge they possessed about organic production, and trust they had in organic labelling. This was sometimes triggered by specific events which reinforced belief and conviction in organic, and influences such as health problems, environmental concerns or the influence of reference group identification. Life events described as having the most significant effect on food habits were associated with health: serious illnesses such as cancer (in friends and family as well as in the principal interviewees) brought about an enhanced awareness of food and the more subtle ways that chemicals can affect human health. This was a major trigger for adoption of organic food habits. Pregnancy also brought about significant changes in food (and other health-orientated) habits, but was not reported to specifically trigger organic food habits or enhanced food awareness; for regular consumers who were already consuming organically, the experience of pregnancy had the effect of strengthening their convictions.

Regular consumers also related their specific knowledge about organic farming to ecological concerns, and possessed confidence in the benefits of the organic mode of production by buying organic produce. They had, at various stages, been convinced of the better quality of organic food. Also, regular consumers had more willingness to pay a price premium for organic food.

In contrast, while occasional consumers also expressed interest in environmental and ethical issues, they did not necessarily view purchase of organic food as the best way to demonstrate such concern. Some viewed local food or fairly-traded products as superior to organic products in terms of their sustainability credentials. Occasional consumers differed from regular consumers in the sense that they were not especially attracted to organic food; they were attracted to good quality food in general, and whether it was organic or not was not of major significance. They did not trust the organic brand as implicitly as the regular consumers.

Chapter 3 Mindsets with regard to organic consumption

3.1. *Thinking about organic food*

During our interviews we attempted to draw out definitions and understandings of the production methods and characteristics of organic foods from each of the three consumer groups. This provided insight into the extent of variation in the theories and concepts underlying food habits; the chapter as a whole is concerned with eliciting differences in perception between consumer groups with regard to the benefits and rewards of consuming organic food.

Most interviewees shared a basic grasp of organic food as food produced without the use of chemicals or artificial pesticides and fertilisers, and a few regular consumers also included support for eco-system management in their definition. What differed between and within the three groups was the degree of trust and conviction that such practices produced food which is safer and of better quality, in terms of the benefits and rewards they sought. Gardner's (2004) ideas of rewards and research can be applied to understand differences in the assessment of organic food benefits between each group. Research plays a role in the development of conceptions of organic food and reflects the way benefits are assessed. It was clear that consumers' perceptions about rewards revolved around a core of trust.

Thus, developing the issues reported in the previous chapter, consumers in each group differed in three respects.

- The first revolved around a trust perspective: whether or not it was believed that production methods accord, in practice, with regulations and, therefore, whether or not any special benefits (at all) accrued to organic products.

This trust perspective was fundamentally important in determining the degree to which the following two sets of benefits were experienced and understood.

- The second involved a personal care perspective: conceptions of personal benefits related to the consumption of organic products, such as a better taste or better general quality, apart from better health.
- The third involved an external care perspective: conceptions of benefits to the environment or benefits related to animal welfare.

Regular organic consumers

Concepts and theories

The regular consumers interviewed tended to have a general, but often vague, understanding of what organic production was, without (on the whole) much accurate technical knowledge. One exceptional interviewee possessed more detailed knowledge about variation in pesticide usage between crops.

When you know that 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. (R2)

However, even in this case, knowledge was implicit rather than based on detailed evidence. Most regular consumers conveyed knowledge about the Soil Association as the major certifying body, and described organic production as being completely free from pesticides, fertilisers, or genetically-modified (GM) material; a minority told us that organic standards permit the use of some chemicals, and others that organic production had high animal welfare standards. Even fewer stated that land used in organic farming had to follow a period of conversion before it could be certified for organic production.

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. (R9)

The trust and conviction that regular consumers possessed were therefore not based on substantial evidence but on a general overview of various aspects of organic production. This appeared to provide sufficient links between the values of organic practices and the benefits, in the light of both personal and external care concerns.

Research and rewards

Regular consumers differed in their assessment of the benefits with regard to consuming organic food in relation to both personal and external care values. In the particular subset of dedicated regular consumers, there was complete conviction and trust in organic food. Consumers in this group were most likely to perceive a full spectrum of benefits, both personal and external. In general, regular consumers in this study spoke positively about organic farming and organic products, although a minority articulated a degree of distaste for the marketing of organic food as a luxury item for a privileged minority.

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. (R4)

This perspective relates to the attitude, introduced earlier, of the alternatively-orientated consumers; those who were sceptical about the motives of large businesses selling organic food, which they regard as predominantly profit-orientated. This anti-commercialism was allied to strong egalitarian views regarding organic food, which ideally everyone should be able to afford.

I think it is overpriced 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. (R9)

This corresponded to a view that there were two types of organic food: the genuine sort, unpretentious, unprocessed and unpackaged, and benefiting the 'common good'; and the relatively new form of luxury, elitist organic food products which are fashionable, expensive and for conspicuous consumption.

Personal care

In terms of health benefits, regular consumers understood that organic food was better for personal health because it is 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. (R5-S)

However, as noted, the ways in which organic food is healthier were not explored in depth, but simply rested on the implication is that organic food contained 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. (R9)

Because health risks associated with conventional produce were unknown, interviewees felt it made intuitive sense to minimise risks by consuming organic food. One exception where health benefits were explored in slightly more depth came from the interview with a regular consumer who had experienced breast cancer, and carried out more extensive research into 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. (R1)

But even in this case, where the interviewee possessed enhanced awareness of possible health risks associated with chemical residues in food, details were not articulated in much depth. Speculation rather than evidence supported the belief that organic food was healthier. The simple fact that fewer chemicals were used to produce organic food was enough to elicit a degree of trust and a conviction that there would be preventative health benefits.

Firm commitment to organic food was supported by stories about the positive characteristics of the taste of organic products. For consumers who had established a firm belief in and orientation towards organic food, better taste was an essential validating characteristic. In some cases, this affirmation about organic taste involved negative descriptions of non-organic food.

Once you've had organic corn flakes... the taste is phenomenal...certainly the [conventional] corn flakes are terrible... they're just horrible. (R5)

Taste featured in stories as a demonstration of how organic food is beneficial, and good taste affirmed the conception of organic food as 'good' and 'better'. Dedicated regular consumers who wished to consume solely organic food were more likely to assert that organic food tasted better, and gave no indication that they wished to challenge this. Positive taste characteristics were also discussed as representing one element of justification for purchase: a reward for buying organic food. Organic carrots, in particular, were cited in relation to taste more than any other food item, but the way they taste better was not described in detail. Stories about other people's experience of the better taste of organic food were referred to, communicating 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. (R9)

Other food items mentioned for better taste by regular consumers included eggs. A nicer taste and the distinct and attractive physical appearance of organic eggs supported the belief that they must be healthier. This perception of rewards and the links that are made between one reward and another can be interpreted with reference to the concept of re-description, which, according to Gardner, is something people will experience when they are developing a mindset about a certain phenomenon. Re-describing something involves perceiving it in an extra positive light because it also fulfils and reinforces other values. Consequently, a consumer who believes that organic food is 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 appeared to be a way of finding evidence that organic food really is better, and this 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...eggs in the house from supermarkets, free range eggs, non-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. (R4)

Some regular consumers also discussed the influence that taste had on their initial decision to start buying organic food. This suggested that there was a collective assumption that organic food tastes better, even before a test had been carried out and evidence 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. (R4)

This conviction concerning better taste relates importantly to the concept of trust. Trust in production methods and labelling of organic food underpinned regular consumer's commitment to buying it. Expectations about better taste formed part of this trust, based on an assumption and belief that the food was purer, unadulterated, and closer to nature.

However, one exceptional regular consumer did not consider this reputation for superior taste as foolproof, indicating how the process of questioning and reappraising food choices occurred continuously and opinions might be brought into question. As Gardner argues, all changes of mind involve some resistance, and so not every regular consumer will aim to initially persuade themselves about the taste benefits of organic food. One interviewee, after exploring kinds of organic food consumed and reasons why, posed the specific question.

I think it has always been that question of "does it taste any better?" Is it worth the extra money that is being charged? Is it actually the way that all food should be produced, which is the true traditional farming way. (R4)

Interestingly, this interviewee was someone who consumed organic food mainly for reasons of quality and taste. On the one hand, he accepted that organic food tasted better but, on the other, trust in this characteristic was not blind; a conscious evaluation process about taste and quality had taken place.

Regular consumers explained that not only taste, but the overall aesthetic appeal of the food is important. It also seemed that the positive appearance of organic food reinforced a conviction about other benefits. For some alternatively-orientated and supermarket-orientated interviewees, this appreciation of aesthetics stretched beyond physical characteristics of food to include packaging (or lack of packaging), appearance (in line with expectations about how organic food should look – for example, vegetables covered in soil) and 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. (R6)

A perception of misshapen and perhaps visually unappealing organic fruit was generally accepted by most regular consumers. They had assimilated these characteristics into their mindset, and would not be put off by it.

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. (R7)

Aesthetic appearance may have been adjusted by regular consumers, but there was an implication that the negative appearance of fruit and vegetables might signify inferior quality, and judgement might be initially based on appearance. In such cases, food choices were 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. (R4)

Therefore, commitment to organic food was not always completely fixed, and food opinions were subject to reappraisal and change. This highlighted the importance of satisfaction and enjoyment in the development of a positive mindset about organic food and for continued purchasing habits.

External care

When describing organic food production and characteristics, a common pattern emerged among regular consumers favouring the organic mode of production. Organic food was considered to be *grown in a good way (R7), produced well (R4), grown in good soil, the animals are treated better [and] farmed in much better conditions (R9).*

Such attributes of organic farming were not verified with specific examples, but regular consumers' belief in organic food revolved around the trust that was such a prominent feature in their narratives.

'Goodness' is described by regular consumers to convey their trust in organic farming methods. There is a tendency for such methods to be perceived as intrinsically inclusive of responsible practices for people, animals and planet. This was consistent with the core motivations underlying most regular consumers' organic habits.

Trying to do the right thing for yourself and for the world. (R5-S)

Regular consumers stressed 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 (R7), it is real food (R4), as natural as it can be (R9), fresh, clean [and] produced in a natural way (R4).*

As well as being authentic, 'real food' also denoted food produced with minimal negative environmental impact, with provision for animal welfare, and related to ethical business practice as well as local self-reliance. Such values were included in perceptions about what 'natural' food means.

Real food was described as food that was pure and uncontaminated with chemicals. Organic food, conforming to set standards, provided a degree of transparency in terms of production methods that most conventional produce did not possess. This satisfied regular consumers' desire for peace of mind which, in turn, inspired trust.

Occasional organic consumers

Concepts and theories

Occasional consumers generally showed as much understanding about the term 'organic' as regular consumers and elaborated as much in their definitions; however, they expressed less certainty and trust in what the organic label actually delivers in practice. This could suggest that they have not fully made up their minds about what they think about organic food; due to a degree of scepticism, they appeared not to value all organic foods in a consistent or committed way.

Nevertheless, the 'good' attribute of genuine organic food was also mentioned explicitly on occasions by this group of consumers; one said that organic food is 'nice and good', but in the context of a direct purchase from a trusted producer. Ideally, most of this group would have preferred food that was free from chemicals; the difference between this group and the regular consumers interviewed was the extent of their trust in the organic foods available to them and, more generally, in the organic label itself.

Only one member of the occasional consumer group (in fact, a secondary interviewee) demonstrated some in-depth knowledge about organic production, in terms of the 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. (O2-S)

She was unusual in the degree of engagement she had with production methods because she grew her own food. Her opinion was that organic food was not as pure as its marketing implies; its benefit was misperceived because it was neither substantially safer nor healthier than conventional produce; it was a waste of time to buy organic versions of certain items like potatoes and, importantly, an unnecessary extra and large expense.

Some occasional consumers knew about the animal welfare dimension of organic standards, particularly with reference to chicken production, but minimally with reference to other meats. Only one member of this group viewed the welfare aspect of organic meat production as a benefit, but because the meat would taste better and be of better quality, rather than the external care benefit expressed through concern for animal suffering.

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. (O5)

Research and rewards

Occasional consumers, like the regular consumers, assessed organic foods in relation to 'personal care' and 'external care' rewards. Again, the degree to which rewards and benefits were experienced related to the degree of trust in organic production in producing these rewards. Two subsets of occasional consumers could be identified: those who trusted in production methods, and those who were more sceptical about organic production and labelling. The 'trust' orientated consumers accepted that organic production methods may have some benefits for animal welfare, human health and environmental issues. The 'sceptical' subset doubted the apparent virtues claimed for this production mode. Benefits experienced by the 'sceptical' subset are qualified with a degree of reservation, suggesting they are not fully convinced about the personal care or external care merits of organic food.

Personal care

In terms of the personal health benefits associated with organic food, most occasional consumers' narratives did not explicitly link organic food with better health, although there were cases which appeared to suggest reasons for organic consumption which were related to health. One 'empty nest' couple bought organic milk once a fortnight, believing it to be safer and therefore healthier than conventional milk, due to its minimal residue 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. (O6)

This interviewee was sceptical about organic food but the habit persisted as a preventative safety measure to limit potential health risks; importantly, this habit was justified because the price differential between organic and conventional milk was minimal. Other occasional consumers bought specific organic food products, such as organic eggs, implying that they were doing so for reasons of safety and trust, linked to health. This was linked to the salmonella in eggs scandal, noted above (see footnote 1).

Supermarket-orientated occasional consumers who trusted the concept and wanted to consume more organic food, made some explicit links between organic foods and healthy living, even though their level of knowledge about the suggested health benefits was minimal. Moreover, observation of a shopping trip in the case of one occasional consumer showed that food labels were not examined carefully while shopping, and that some products were assumed to be organic when actually they were not. This suggested that occasional consumers were less likely to seek information than regular and dedicated consumers.

Supermarket-orientated occasional consumers said they might like to buy more organic food, but in terms of health benefits, perhaps as adults it was perhaps too late to make a health improvement.

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. (O2)

Interestingly, this consumer linked his reasoning directly with childhood experience of food, which could suggest that food habits formed in early life have a considerable impact on adulthood food habits.

Some occasional consumers expressed strong views about the visual appearance of organic food, especially vegetables.

And sometimes I look at the organic stuff and it's so disgusting, especially the vegetables that I think, I don't want to buy that. It looks so foul. (O8)

Occasional consumers did not make statements as bold as those of regular consumers about the superior taste of organic food. The few occasional consumers who mentioned better taste were from the trust-orientated subset, and only acknowledged better organic taste with respect to certain products.

My husband...he's quite happy to have organic food. It's tastier. He does agree that it's tastier, like carrots and stuff. (O4)

The better taste of organic food was also mentioned in respect of food items such as meat; organic chicken was frequently 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... the texture of organic meat was just phenomenal, unbelievable. (O3)

However, sceptical occasional consumers did not frequently mention differences in taste between organic and conventional products. Where better taste was talked about, it was generally not explained in relation to the organic label but to the freshness or free range aspect of the food.

Organic chicken is not as good as the free range chicken in terms of taste. (O6-S)

In some instances, better taste was completely refuted, and it was pointed out that lack of better taste provided evidence for scepticism about the authenticity of organic food.

Actually I can't taste... I don't know how those chickens have really lived because there is no real traceability. (O1)

The higher price of organic products was emphasised by members of the occasional consumer group in both the 'trust' and 'sceptical' subsets; this consideration was frequently given as a reason for not buying organic products.

External care

Approximately half of the group put greater emphasis on animal welfare issues, environmental sustainability and social aspects of food production, than on 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. (O1)

But aren't things often organic and free range and everything, so if you want something free range, it ends up being organic? ... I would buy free range for humanitarian reasons, I wouldn't deliberately seek out organic. (O9)

Arguments associated with ‘external care’ demonstrated commitment to ethical issues, and illustrated that some important organic benefits related to broader citizen-consumer issues, rather than those operating merely at the individual level.

Putting others first effectively...and fair trade is putting someone else over my own [health] ... (O2)

Non-organic consumers

Concepts and theories

When asked to define the concept of organic food, non-consumers were less likely to speak about the positive aspects of organic systems of production. Interviewees in this group showed a similar understanding of ‘organic’ as those in other groups, in terms of being pesticide- and chemical-free; equally, they expressed some confusion in terms of its practical farming implications.

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. (N2)

I'm a little bit confused by the term organic... I've heard that producers that call themselves organic can use some kinds of pesticides and fertilisers as long as they are not chemicals...so I am confused... (N3)

The confusion experienced by non-consumers might have related to attitudes of mistrust in organic food products. They tended to express anti-commercial sentiments, and characterised foods as raw material ingredients to be purchased not because of their branding or label, but for the simpler principles of freshness and necessity. Exceptions were made, however, in relation to Fairtrade food products which were reported as being purchased occasionally. In contrast to Fairtrade foods, organic foods were seen by non-consumers as expensive and fancy, suggesting that they were for more conspicuous consumption. Additionally, suspicion of the organic sector was linked with disapproval of the financial interests of supermarkets chains.

Yes I've definitely become more sceptical about it now that it has been embraced so much by the main supermarkets [and] obviously there is the question of cost which has an impact. (N3)

Concerns related to food were linked more to issues of development, poverty, and environmental quality. The non-organic group was less concerned with any health risks associated with chemical residues in food, and so potential health benefits associated with organic foods did not appear in their discussions. Like occasional consumers, non-consumers appeared to place more importance on external rather 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. (N3)

These non-consumers considered ethical dimensions of product choice when shopping. However, mistrust of organic food and its commercialisation clearly operated as a barrier to organic food consumption.

Research and rewards

As discussed earlier, non-organic consumers did not mention the personal care benefit or health advantages of consuming organically, apart from one comment which described organic food as containing less toxins (N1); however, this was not expanded upon to form an argument for organic consumption. Also, all three non-organic consumers challenged the conviction that organic food really tasted better, and expressed a lack of trust in the claims which promoted it. There was a suggestion that some organic produce may be the best quality available, and that the production

techniques may be preferable, but these qualities were trumped by high costs, lack of trust and therefore a lack of substantial perceivable rewards. In talking in general about food, external benefits relating to environmental issues, social concerns and animal welfare were mentioned by non-consumers, but without specific reference to organic production.

3.2. Assessing organic foods

Regular food consumers' narratives featured accounts of emotional and practical reasons for purchasing organic food which were important in changing minds and behaviours in respect of food habits.

Analysis of narratives regarding satisfaction and dissatisfaction with organic products shows how reasons were influenced by positive and negative experiences, and how such experiences contributed to the development of concepts and theories about organic food. Interviewees, making up their mind about organic food, used experience as a form of research, part of a collection of relevant data which may complement an argument, or discredit it. Following Gardner, we distinguish between levels of changes of mind: value-based reasons, and practical reasons and rewards. Value-based reasons were related to positive generic concepts associated with organic production and products (for example, sustainability or animal welfare), but were not necessarily linked to the consumer's actual purchasing habits. Rather they were idealistic or emotional preconditions that could contribute to the development of regular and loyal organic purchasing habits. Practical reasons and rewards included changes of mind attributed to better availability, lower price, better taste or quality. This section examines both value-based and practical reasons in mind changing.

3.2.1. Value-based reasons for mind change

As already described, regular consumers of organic food had marginally greater levels of knowledge about organic production, had most trust and conviction in the method, and also spoke more fully about external rewards, such as ethics, animal welfare and environmental sustainability, as relevant benefits arising from the experience of organic consumption. In most cases, members of this group incorporated both practical and emotional reasons into a rationale for their organic habits.

Ethics

The ethics of food choices featured substantially where value-based reasons for adopting regular organic food habits were discussed. Ethics included social values about how enterprises were structured organisationally, whether companies purchased local or fairly-traded produce, how environmentally friendly they were, and how much they could be trusted generally. If these criteria were positive, food gained additional worth beyond its intrinsic value as a consumable product by offering the sense of having made a contribution towards an important 'external care' cause. Consumers who could afford to spend time and resources thinking about and acting upon food issues were more likely to consider ethics.

Narratives of some regular consumers (usually those with higher incomes) included stories about ethical consumerism. They believed in being active citizens in their shopping habits, resisting or supporting certain products and their associated modes of production. In such cases, the change towards organic food purchasing involved ethical reasons, taking personal responsibility and action which demonstrated commitment to values such as ecological wellbeing and animal welfare.

If there is more demand they will start putting more products on the shelves. The reason I go to the farmers' 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. (R8)

Animal welfare

If regular consumers spoke about ethics, generally they also spoke about animal welfare. Regular, occasional and non-organic consumers all, to some degree, discussed animal welfare as a food ideal or preference, but not all related this concept to organic food. Narratives indicated that changes of mind in relation to animal welfare can be emotional and abrupt and could be triggered by channels of information describing 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. (O2)

The jolting impact of experiencing such media representations transformed shopping habits and turned animal welfare into a sought after preference. For more affluent consumers, this might have been 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. (O4)

As noted previously, better taste (associated with well-treated animals) was mentioned by interviewees in the context of animal welfare. Also, whether an animal has led a 'happy life' because of what they are fed was cited as important, because of the link between animal wellbeing and the subsequent taste of the meat, and some suggested that organic foods are considered safer because of better welfare.

In the sense that I buy organic... that is a high level of protection, if you like. (R2)

For those on lower incomes, a real world event such as a television programme alone might not have been enough for animal welfare to become a decisive buying motive. Changes in shopping behaviour might require additional, more mundane reasons to bring a goal into reach. Gardner argues that resources and rewards have to complement each other for a change of mind to occur, and the consequential behaviour to take place. A drop in price might well have functioned as a 'tipping point' in this regard.

We've both got siblings who are interested in ethics and organic and what not and I saw Hugh Fearnley-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". (O2)

The non-consumers interviewed discussed animal welfare as an aspiration, but for most 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... pay day, 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 £1 on 15 eggs. So it's basically down to that. (N1)

Exceptionally, though, one of the non-consumers adapted her shopping behaviour to favour free range eggs, initially following the salmonella scare regarding eggs, and supported by welfare concerns and the experience of free range eggs that tasted 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. They [chickens] lead happier lives. (N2)

Another type of event which featured in stories and caused a jolting change in food habits was a farm visit. Often, visits to organic farms involved learning about conventional farming techniques,

and could have brought about a realisation that mass production of meat and the slaughter of animals in abattoirs do not consider the welfare of animals. In some cases, this had spurred a move to a vegetarian diet, and in others, the sourcing of organic chicken, red 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 metre in free range. Organic free range is much better for the chicken. (R5)

In terms of animal welfare, chicken and eggs were mentioned most by interviewees as products which are always bought free range due to concerns about cruel production conditions.

Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism featured prominently in the narratives of regular consumers of organic food, although rarely in those of occasional and non-consumers. Vegetarianism was generally linked to concerns for animal welfare; those who believed strongly in fair treatment of animals were either vegetarian themselves, had been vegetarian in the past, or had a close vegetarian family member or friend. In narratives of regular consumers who were or had been vegetarian, the initial trigger for adopting the diet was directly related to information about either 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. (R2)

I think when I was 12 and became vegetarian, issues about animal welfare were really big and that had a major influence. I think today I am relieved that I am vegetarian because of the health scares. (R3)

I was vegetarian for about a year and a half...That was because I read the chicken article. (R5)

In the latter case, vegetarianism was temporarily adopted due to lack of trust in the meat industry, and the interviewee re-introduced meat into her diet once a trusted and reliable butcher was found. The 'chicken article' described the poultry processing industry in the UK, and identified the main problem as potential risks of food poisoning. In this case, benefits for personal health were likely to have been the central motivation and reward for changing food habits.

Some other regular consumers, however, related 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. (R5)

Adopting organic food habits because they 'felt right' was a value-based reason which did not offer any tangible, practical, or physical rewards. A number of regular consumers spoke of the spiritual dimension in their food practices, though spirituality in relation to food habits was absent from narratives of occasional or non-consumers.

Environmental issues

Environmentalism was also a value-based rationale for assessing organic food. It was unusual for environmental issues to actually stimulate a rapid mind change in favour of organic, but they complemented other practical reasons such as seasonality and traceability, and contributed to an overall assessment of organic food. Food miles, packaging and recycling were the environmental issues that recurred, and were important for interviewees who aspired to minimise negative impacts.

Organic was seen generally as 'better for the planet' for some regular consumers: others noted that this was only true if the food was not shipped halfway around the world. For dedicated regular consumers, local, regional, and seasonal produce will be considered a better buy than organic, because of the negative environmental effects of food transport.

Occasional consumers of organic food spoke more about local food than regular consumers, and used the perceived high level of 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's going to support people's livelihoods here. (O1)

This support for local produce was so strong, that imported organic and non-organic food items were 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 (O1)

Non-consumers' narratives also featured concern for environmental issues, food miles and also 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. (N2)

3.2.2. Practically-based reasons

Availability

An important practically-based reason given for change in food habits in favour of organic food was how easy and accessible it was to buy. Increasing availability made value-based reasons for consuming organic food feasible.

Regular consumers, especially the supermarket-orientated, observed how much more accessible organic food has become in the last ten years, and the latter group discussed this development with enthusiasm, expressing a belief that organic ranges within supermarkets were continuously improving.

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. (R6)

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... (R9)

Supermarket-orientated regular consumers, often pressurised for time, emphasised how the ease of being able to find organic products within a supermarket is a major bonus, and approved of this development within the organic market. In contrast, alternatively-orientated regular consumers treated recent availability of organic food within supermarkets with suspicion, implying that it might be indicative of unsavoury profiteering. Although this latter group tended to avoid the supermarket on a matter of principle, there was some acknowledgement of the challenges, in terms of availability, involved in shopping for organic food in smaller outlets.

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. (R5-S)

Occasional consumers were less satisfied than regular consumers regarding organic availability, stressing poor availability as a factor explaining infrequency of purchase, as well as support for a claim that more organic food would be purchased in future. For the supermarket-orientated occasional consumers, stories include incidences of supermarkets running out of organic items, clearly important obstacles 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. (O2)

Alongside availability, increased promotion of organic food has affected 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. (O2)

Alternatively-orientated occasional consumers' narratives did not include much dissatisfaction with organic availability. Those who spoke of it contrasted poor organic food availability with the alternative of shopping at farmers' markets, where most food is local and seasonal but, on the whole, not organic. This was not perceived to be a problem; alternatively-orientated occasional consumers deliberately and consciously chose to consume in a way that they believed sustainable, which did not necessarily involve buying organic food.

Importantly, notions about availability varied, depending somewhat on shopping location; the availability of organic food in most supermarkets did not affect those who chose to avoid them. Location thus seemed to be of less significance than the amount of research and shopping visits a consumer was willing to complete to establish where organic food was available. For some occasional consumers, putting such effort into food sourcing was simply not convenient.

Quality, labelling and brand

For supermarket-orientated regular consumers who purchased packaged organic food, the organic label was important and operated like a brand. In this context, 'organic' food represented 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. (R4)

Supermarket-orientated regular consumers were motivated by convenience and tended to stick to relatively structured shopping habits. This preference for branded products (whether organic or not) indicated how brands could assist in shopping tasks and make the negotiation of the often confusing shopping arena easier and more efficient. Within this group, examples of satisfaction with organic food featured stories about favourite organic brands, suggesting also that they liked to establish food routines, appreciate the predictability that comes with branded food, and would keep buying a product that fulfilled taste criteria, and was 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. (R7)

Brands functioned to allow consumers to easily identify quality with packaging and to develop trust in products, making shopping quicker and easier. This was 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. (R4)

Alternatively-orientated regular consumers, however, tended to be more selective when purchasing organic food, since they had less trust in the authenticity of the organic label, and believed that supermarkets used the label mainly to make profit.

Stories which featured branded foods and product satisfaction included either positive association for brands (because of affinity for a company's ethical policy or practical satisfaction because 'they taste lovely'), or convenience.

Occasional consumers tended not to display any kind of brand satisfaction or loyalty. On the whole, they bought organic products direct from producers rather than from supermarkets and avoided branded products. However, one supermarket-orientated occasional consumer spoke about organic food as if it were a brand. This consumer's brand-orientation is described by the secondary interviewee.

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. (O2-S)

Generally, alternatively-orientated occasional consumers expressed mistrust in labels and supermarkets' promotional techniques through an unwillingness to accept widely available, mass-produced items of organic food; they remained unconvinced of any real benefits of organic produce, and instead favoured fresh (and sometimes organic) produce direct from farmers' markets. This rejection of branded food was consistent with a frequently expressed anti-commercial attitude, most often in a desire to avoid being deceived by big businesses which attempt to manipulate their spending.

Non-consumers also said little positive about food brands. This was partly because of premium attached to cost, which they argued was unnecessary in terms of quality. Also, it was suggested that brands were used by businesses to tempt consumers 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. (N2)

This generic dismissal of brands corresponds to the cynicism and lack of trust that this group articulated in relation to organic food.

Taste

Stories about satisfaction with organic food often featured the superior taste of organic food in comparison to conventional variants, to the extent that this constituted the most favoured means of justifying decisions to buy organic food.

When you eat organic strawberries or carrots the taste is so incredibly different. (R9)

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. (R5)

The colour and smell of organic fruit and vegetables also featured as points of satisfaction, and were used to support the concept that organic food was more authentic and closer to nature.

In contrast, for non-consumers who had tried organic food (purchased, for example, when it had been on special offer), dissatisfaction was expressed in terms of taste expectations having not been met; the expectation that organic food should taste better was not met in reality.

Health

When assessing organic food, most regular consumers' narratives noted the potential health benefits of eating organic food. Generally, they had conviction that organic food was free from pesticide

residues, and possessed ‘natural’ and ‘pure’ characteristics viewed as better for personal health. This health aspect of organic food played a significant role – especially during certain lifecycle phases such as the beginning of adulthood when starting a family, or later on in life – and facilitated organic consumption, especially when complemented by other practical factors like availability or 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. (R8)

For regular and occasional consumers who had suffered health problems (cancer, food allergies and digestive problems) health featured as a reason to start eating organic food. In these cases, the change of food habits and mindsets was more likely to be abrupt, to take immediate effect, and to relate to specific dietary needs and changes.

I think it stemmed from [partner’s name] being ill really... Yeah that was a significant driver because we had the force to change habits. (O3)

It was mainly stomach problems, noticing that after lunch I often felt quite sick or bloated. (R5-S)

Although health was a major trigger in changing food habits, for most interviewees the change appeared to be gradual rather than jolting, and involved a complex set of requirements and aspirations for food which crystallised over time. One exception was the regular consumer who was diagnosed with breast cancer. Otherwise, one of the major influences – often health – began the process; on further consideration, other factors such as environmental concerns and animal welfare became assimilated. Additional value-based reasons, which complemented other reasons, played a role in the re-description process which reinforced 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 [when I was pregnant], but life moves in a different mode. (R2)

As noted earlier, real-life events such as pregnancy and child rearing sometimes also had a relatively abrupt effect on food habits. The aspiration not to consume unhealthy food and to avoid toxins became more important. However, this did not generally prompt loyal organic food habits but, rather, inspired healthy eating more generally.

Dissatisfaction with organic food

Even when experiences of organic food had not been completely satisfying, narratives indicated that the established mindset of a regular consumer was not easily swayed. Some regular consumers reported organic vegetables and fruit perishing quickly; particularly in regard to organic fruit, this was discouraging and non-organic alternatives were purchased instead. The experience was not significant enough, however, to cause organic food preference to be abandoned. Sometimes it even provided confirmation of the appealing characteristics of organic food, since fruit and 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. (R9)

Trust-orientated occasional consumers resembled regular consumers in their general convictions about organic food and often expressed a desire to consume more in the future. Sceptical occasional consumers, however, lack trust in production methods and regulatory procedures as well as supermarkets. The implication was 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. (O6)

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. (O6-S)

This lack of trust was confirmed by experiences of poor quality organic food, and stories about dissatisfaction supported decisions 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. (O6)

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. (O1)

Non-consumers were similarly sceptical about authenticity of organic production and the consequences for food quality and taste. In some cases, scepticism was based on a combination of disappointing experiences and lack of objective, trusted information about organic production methods. Additionally, this was overlain with concerns about unnecessary plastic packaging (which detracts from the organic image of food) and lack of trust in supermarkets.

3.3. *Influencing others with respect to organic consumption*

This section examines what regular consumers said about arguments used to influence others about organic food products. These interviewees were asked a direct question about if and how they would influence others about organic food.

3.3.1. Indirect influence

Many regular consumers felt uncomfortable with the idea of influencing people to buy organic food particularly because of its relatively higher cost.

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. (R9)

What emerged from these interviews was a common understanding among regular consumers that, because of the premium price of organic food, it is a privilege to be able to afford to buy it.

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. (R2)

Thus, they tended not to want to influence others, apart from those who were very close, to buy organic food. The rationale was a desire to be sensitive to others' personal food habits and also to respect the choices people made.

I'm a great believer in education not taking the choice away. So give people a choice... (R4)

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 [partner's name], because we live together. And so that's a huge thing. (R6)

In one exceptional case, the partner of the principal shopper had been significantly influenced. Prior to becoming a couple, the partner did not consume organic food at all. The secondary interview confirmed that, though he still had lingering preferences for certain non-organic brands, his appreciation, enjoyment and food practice had changed dramatically since meeting his partner.

Yeah I mean it's not like we don't agree if I want to buy something I'll just buy it [but] a lot of it is driven by health, a lot of it's driven by the way we want to live out lifestyle and healthy living, completely driven by healthy living for me and I know it is for [partner's name], but for me I have to say it's more healthy living than anything else. (R6-S)

Some regular consumers suggested that influence had taken place gradually: the introduction to organic food leading to experience of 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. (R6)

There were some regular consumers who consciously shared what they had 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. (R4-S)

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. (R9)

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

3.3.2. Direct influence

One exceptional interviewee, a dedicated regular consumer, particularly committed to ethical consumerism, was more active in promoting the benefits of the organic food.

[partner's name]'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. (R5)

Every time we have a discussion, [partner's name] gives all the details and explains to them how much better it is. (R5-S)

R5 displayed passion for spreading the word about sustainable consumption and healthy eating, as well as belief that, through being a consumer, everybody could 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. [colleague's name], 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. (R5)

3.4. Conclusion: the mindsets of regular consumers of organic food compared to those of occasional and non-consumers

This chapter examined narratives from all three consumer groups to explore the differences in understanding of the concept of organic food, and perspectives about rewards or benefits relating to organic food. The examination extended between and also within the three different groups.

Most interviewees had a limited knowledge and understanding of organic farming practices, and knew even less about food processing conventions. Most interviewees could identify the Soil Association as the main organic certification body, and shared a similar understanding of organic production methods involving the use of less harmful pest control and fertilisation methods than conventional food production. Despite this shared view, there were some distinct differences between regular consumers and the other two groups.

Firstly, regular consumers in our sample tended, over a period of time, to have developed mindsets which involved trust in the various benefits of organic food. Shopping habits consequently changed, initially in line with the development of conviction from assessment of rewards, and then in response to practical reasons such as increased availability. The majority of regular consumers had devoted more time to research about organic food, and consequently their understanding of organic food was more detailed. A distinct attribute of this mindset, in comparison to others, was the existence of value-based reasons for consuming organic food, personal care benefits relating to health in particular. Regular consumers interviewed had developed a strong conviction, which did not sway even after experiences of product dissatisfaction. Positive assessments of organic food were related to trust in the general benefits of organic production. Trust in methods and practice of organic production and labelling provided an important foundation for the conviction that buying organic food was worthwhile. 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.

In contrast, sceptical occasional consumers, and all non-consumers, more willingly questioned the benefits identified for consuming organic food. They were also less likely to be convinced of the environmental benefits of organic production. Organic food benefits were not believed to exist in relation to health. Better taste was generally either not perceived, or not considered significant enough to be worth paying extra money for. These resistances to organic consumption were also based on a perception that organic products were not as pure as their promotion suggested. Some occasional consumers doubted whether there really were significant differences between organic and conventional produce, and associated organic promotion practices with profiteering and big business.

Value-based reasons relating to external care benefits (environmental sustainability and animal welfare) featured in the mindsets of consumers from all three organic groups. Regular and occasional consumers rated the importance of such external care values similarly and expressed their relevance to food consumption. However, the occasional consumers interviewed were more likely to favour other ideals, such as buying local produce because it is sustainable or buying Fairtrade goods because they benefit poorer people. The dedicated organic consumers demonstrated the most conviction in their power as consumers to achieve their 'external care' beliefs through shopping practice. In contrast, the mindsets of most non-consumers featured no such commitment to value-based external care reasons.

Difficulties with limited availability and concerns about the price of organic food were recounted by regular and occasional consumers. The most common practically-based reasons which had contributed to a change in the assessment of organic and in the practice of organic food habits were those of increased availability and greater affordability. 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, it was still relatively limited and this posed an enduring obstacle to increased regular organic food consumption.

Increased availability of organic food was a concrete real-world event which functioned as a tipping point for a change in habits among current regular consumers and some occasional consumers

interviewed. Importantly, though, this tipping point only functioned when other established levers were in place. Interviewees who responded to increased availability (the practical real-world event) had already carried out a positive assessment of organic food, in terms of a range of value-based reasons and associated personal care and external care benefits.

While most regular consumers in our sample were reticent regarding attempting to influence others about the benefits of organic food, a few dedicated organic consumers interviewed had strong conviction about the benefits of organic food and would consciously try to influence others. The other regular consumers claimed not to want to influence others directly, but reported more subtle forms of influence, such as inviting people to taste organic food or speaking about it positively. However, in contrast, most consumers claimed to have themselves been influenced by the example of other people.

Chapter 4 Habits with respect to organic consumption

Here we examine the range of products purchased by regular and occasional consumers; their substitution strategies, loyalty and barriers to loyalty.

4.1. Buying organic foods

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

Dedicated regular organic consumers

A small subset of regular consumers was found to have such a strong commitment to organic food that all, or as much as was possible, of the food they bought was organic; if there was an organic option of anything, they would buy it. For these consumers, the product range might include meat, chicken, fish, vegetables and fruit, dairy products, eggs, cereals, tea, coffee and chocolate. This group has been defined earlier as ‘dedicated’ regular consumers.

They were likely to be health conscious and politically aware, basing most food-related decisions on value-driven and emotional reasons rather than on practicality or convenience. Value-driven reasons included environmental sustainability, animal welfare and business ethics. To further support environmental commitment, this group of consumers were also likely to mention buying ecologically-friendly cleaning products and organic cosmetics.

I tend to go for the Ecover brands for those because of their environmental record. (R5)

[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. (R6)

One characteristic of dedicated organic consumers was that they tended not to follow strict shopping routines or rigid, pre-established patterns of food consumption. Rather, organic products bought varied from week to week and they declared their enjoyment of experimenting with new products. Dedicated consumers were open to trying new organic products, forming part of the process of research which Gardner (2004) argues is an important element in the development of a mindset. In this context, the present and continuous process of trying and testing products might have been indicative of the relatively novel adoption of organic food habits which were still developing. Additionally, such continuous experimentation was significant for the future demand for organic food and suggested that dedicated organic consumers had a positive response to new products.

Yeah I like experiencing, I like experimenting. (R6)

Oh completely I would say, yeah. I am completely open to trying new products. (R5)

Dedicated organic consumers tended to be alternatively-orientated in respect of their shopping locations, using a wide variety of small specialist organic and health food shops. This included shops visited frequently, as well as other shops visited on a spontaneous or basis. There was one exception of a dedicated organic consumer who was generally supermarket-orientated, but whose narrative also suggested enjoying 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. (R6)

Even though this consumer was supermarket-orientated, the choice of supermarkets frequented reflected research into each chain's business ethics. Large supermarkets such as Tesco were rejected in favour of upmarket stores with positive ethical reputations.

As already discussed, dedicated regular consumers generally aspired to shop ethically, and portrayed this as a way of putting a set of political and philosophical values (specifically, ecological and social citizenship) into practice.

I've always believed in voting with your shopping basket. (R9)

This might have included purchases of Fairtrade food and other goods. This interviewee, for example, had recently purchased a Fairtrade football for her son as an example of her commitment to sustainable, ethical consumption.

As well as a primary concern for food ethics or external care concerns, dedicated organic consumers reported a degree of pleasure being derived from shopping activity. Pleasure was not only associated with the sensory experiences of food such as taste and enjoyment, but was also associated with pride in practicing mindful ethical shopping. As Douglas and Isherwood (1996: ix) suggest, goods "make physical, visible statements about the hierarchy of values to which their chooser subscribes".

Dedicated regular consumers were likely to receive an above average income and to be unconcerned about cost issues. There was one exception, a dedicated regular consumer who had a limited food budget but believed so strongly in the personal and external care benefits derived from organic consumption that she worked incredibly hard to fulfil her aspirations.

Regular organic consumers

Other regular consumers were not exclusively organic purchasers and spoke about selecting what were perceived to be the most important organic food items considered worth paying extra 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 but for certain things you feel really ripped off. (R2)

For some, staple goods like milk, yoghurt, eggs and vegetables came high on the priority list. Reasons given related to differences between conventional and organic farming practices; for example, the knowledge that conventional root vegetables were grown with more potentially hazardous chemicals than organic variants. It was believed that such chemicals may be absorbed into the food chain and consequently eaten.

With organic vegetables you're not going to have chemical residues. (R7)

Concern about dairy products related to treatments in animal feed, such as hormones that might get into the food chain. Others favoured organic meat and dairy products but consumed conventional rather than organic vegetables. Reasons given were related to the cost of organic vegetables, and the relative convenience of buying conventional produce. One regular consumer had recently cancelled an organic vegetable box delivery and reverted 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. (R4)

Price was thus an important deciding factor in relation to buying organic vegetables (either all vegetables or selected varieties) partly because there was an assessment from a food safety perspective that it was not very important for vegetables to be organic. Additionally, it was asserted

that specific crops which only require minimal pesticide control differed little whether they were conventional or organic, either in terms of personal health or for the environment.

In contrast to this view of vegetables, meat-consuming regular consumers tended to buy organic on the grounds of traceability, safety and health.

I won't eat meat unless I know that it's pretty much organic or from a good supplier. (R5)

Animal welfare issues and ethics also featured as value-based reasons for consumption of organic animal products, with a common assumption that organic standards resulted in 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. (R7)

As mentioned earlier, many regular consumers received an organic vegetable box delivery. For many, this was the only organic food they consumed and other foods were non-organic, leading to an altogether more relaxed approach to organic consumption within which loyalty to organic was not always at the forefront of their 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. (R2)

Occasional organic consumers

Occasional consumers tended to buy one organic item such as milk, eggs or meat on an occasional basis, either from a 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. (O1)

The perceived benefits of consuming such items derived from trust in the supplier on issues of quality and food safety. The tendency was for occasional consumers to buy a particular organic product for a specific reason or, otherwise, through direct sale where trust was gained in relation to the product or from purchasing context. Trust was not extended to organic food in general. Loyalty was practiced in specific exchanges and did not apply generally to organic food. However, some supermarket-orientated occasional consumers had similar levels of trust in organic food as regular consumers and believed in external care and personal care benefits. Nonetheless, the degree of commitment to organic food production was only expressed through irregular and infrequent purchasing patterns. This group did not appear to invest substantial time or effort into consuming organically.

Like for instance Waitrose do have a shelf of organic food. Now sometimes their organic raspberries look really lovely compared with the ordinary raspberries, so I would buy the organic raspberries. But if it was the other way around, I would buy the ordinary raspberries ... I would go and see what was available and then make my choice from that. (O7)

Supermarket-orientated occasional consumers responded to increased organic food availability in supermarkets and, while they expressed aspirations to consume more organic products, they were frustrated by poor availability. Alternatively-orientated occasional consumers, who purchased food at small shops and farmers' markets because produce was local or came direct from producers, appeared unconcerned about whether such local produce was organic or not. Their major concern was 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. (O4)

4.2. Substitution strategies

Substitution strategies were deployed when consumers were not able to buy a desired organic product; for example when a shop had sold out. We particularly sought instances of this during observed shopping trips to see how consumers responded in practice.

Dedicated regular organic consumers

Dedicated regular consumers appeared to be most willing to look elsewhere to find a particular organic item they were looking for, thus explicitly demonstrating their high level of organic commitment. Pressures of contemporary life were worked around, and considerable perseverance in seeking out organic food was observed, despite time constraints, geographical inconveniences and other obstacles. Some of this subset spoke of their determination to find particular organic products, and substitution with a non-organic product was definitely 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. (R9)

Even if the task was inconvenient, this strategy of relocating to find an organic item was 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. (R6)

Dedicated consumers were so determined to consume organic food that substantial discomfort was tolerated to procure desired products, and there were 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. (R5)

Further, there was evidence which suggested a tendency to substitute one kind of organic product that is unavailable with another (close substitution) rather than 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 rather have something that is organic. (R9)

In practice, however, constraints did occasionally affect even the most dedicated organic consumers. There were accounts of instances, as well as observed shopping, where non-organic items were bought out of necessity. On one shopping trip the interviewee was at his local greengrocer looking for organic bananas. On learning that the shop had just sold out he settled on the non-organic variety instead.

Regular organic consumers

In contrast to dedicated consumers, most in this subgroup appeared to be relatively relaxed about a situation in which they were unable to purchase an organic product as planned, and would substitute the product with a non-organic variety. The product most discussed in this context was milk; regular consumers who normally bought organic milk would buy conventional milk if organic had sold out,

or they had run out of their usual supply and needed to top up. This was demonstrated in interviews as well as during shopping trips. In most cases, convenience drove 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. (R2)

Evidence from an observed shopping trip with one regular consumer demonstrated a similar attitude. The consumer did not notice the organic milk and, without looking too hard, went directly for conventional milk and put that in the trolley. There was no obvious discomfort; generally, the response to the situation where organic was unavailable was one of resignation, and making do with what was available. Sometimes this was an alternative organic product; at others, it was non-organic.

Such resignation was a common feature of regular consumers' shopping, and was observed on shopping trips as well in interviewees' accounts. In particular, where a shop had only a limited range of organic products, non-organic items were purchased quite routinely by regular consumers. Practical constraints such as time, cost and convenience accounted for the substitution strategies regular consumers employed while shopping.

4.3. Loyalty towards organic food and barriers to loyalty

4.3.1. Loyalty

Loyalty to organic food products stemmed 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 benefits. Trust, therefore, underpinned loyalty to organic food. Where a link was perceived between production methods, care benefits and practical reasons, appreciation and support were expressed through loyal organic shopping habits. One way that trust formed was through acquisition of knowledge, a process of combining interest with research. The more time invested in researching and investigating organic food, the more likely it was that meanings were derived and loyalty arose.

Dedicated organic food consumers expressed loyalty by buying as much organic food as they could. This group engineered their shopping to maximise the possibility of being able to purchase organic food products. Besides being loyal to the concept of organic food, there was also loyalty to shopping in specific locations which, in some cases, included a desire to support small businesses. Local farmers' markets and small specialist shops were the preferred shopping locations. The one supermarket-orientated dedicated consumer chose upmarket supermarkets where the range of organic goods was extensive. Dedicated regular consumers were most likely to have a firmly consolidated mindset about their organic commitment, including elements based on logical reasons, research, resonance, re-descriptions and real world events; even when faced with resistance (such as inconvenience, expense, dissatisfaction), this mindset remained solidly unchanged.

Regular consumers were not as fully committed to being completely organic in their food habits and spoke about loyalty only to particular organic goods such as dairy products, or for specific reasons such as health. This comes out strongly in the narrative of the consumer who had 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. (R1)

In this case, health and disease prevention had been assessed and research reinforced the belief that organic dairy products were safer. Real world events such as increased availability made this preference for organic food more possible and resources such as time and money were available to facilitate the preference. Rewards included peace of mind and a sense of control and security over

health concerns. Resistance could be seen in unwillingness to extend this loyalty to other organic products. However, her resistance related directly to the practical price consideration.

Some regular consumers were loyal to a particular organic product which they always bought as organic. Often, this type of one-off loyalty related 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. (R4-S)

Loyalty in this context was selective and tied to satisfaction of sensory pleasure. Reference to a broader commitment to organic food, stemming from a range of personal and external care rewards, was explored during the latter part of the interview. This prompted reflections on the benefits gained from organic 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. (R1)

Occasional consumers also showed loyalty to certain organic products, for specific personal care rewards such as safety and quality. For example, the household which always bought organic milk believed that doing so minimised their health risks. This loyalty was also directly related to the practical factor of price.

[first of all] the price differential is not so great ...and the quality and the taste of the milk I find is something which appeals to me really, specifically with the milk. (O6)

Generally, most regular and occasional consumers who had established a routine of purchasing an available organic product, with which they were satisfied in terms of taste and quality, would continue to purchase that product frequently. Consumers tended not to change their habits unless they were confronted with a context where the product was unavailable. Lack of availability was mentioned as a barrier by occasional consumers who wanted to consume more organic products but did not persevere against the constraints imposed by contemporary living. There was an almost apologetic tone because they were defeated by real life events, such as lack of availability or lack of time to shop in a number of locations.

I will try to buy more and more organic, but only because there's more and more available, because availability is still the issue. (O2)

4.3.2. Barriers to loyalty

Most regular, occasional and non-consumers of organic food suggested a preference for organic food production in which food was believed to be produced in a way that was natural (and therefore healthy) and sustainable; it simply made sense. This concept resonated as a good idea for all consumers but was subject to certain resistances; barriers to the consumption of organic food in specific contexts. A belief in the ideal of organic food did not necessarily lead to full commitment in purchasing it. Trust in organic production was bound up with how benefits and barriers are perceived by consumers. High levels of trust in organic food affected the way that these barriers were managed and, perhaps, transcended by dedicated regular consumers.

Shopping locations/availability

Alternatively-orientated regular and occasional consumers had little trust in organic food that was sold in supermarkets. This was not the kind of organic food they wanted, and they were 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. (R4)

I wouldn't want to buy organic from Tesco that's not what organic would mean for me. (R2)

For such consumers who wanted to avoid supermarkets, organic food sourcing required more time and effort, which could be a barrier to consumption in cases where availability and time were issues. However, dedicated consumers who had rigorous organic purchasing habits often transcended this barrier by putting time and energy into sourcing organic products from various locations.

Occasional and regular consumers who were constrained by time found availability a constraint on loyalty because it was their choice to shop at the most convenient locations, often supermarkets close to their homes. The lack of availability of the authentic organic products they desired – those possessing traceability and an information system that guarantees that the food is actually what it is – was often cited as a reason for not purchasing more organic products.

The problem is the opportunity for me to purchase that food. (O6)

Processed organic food

Preference for basic raw organic ingredients over processed organic food was expressed by all interviewees. Such authenticity fitted the concept of the organic method of production resulting in unadulterated and natural foods. The rejection of organic food from Tesco, mentioned earlier, could be viewed as part of this desire to consume trusted foods. An organic label was not always enough to persuade a consumer to purchase an organic product if it was in more processed form. The development of processed organic food products by supermarkets roused some suspicion among consumers who required verification that organic food can be trusted.

Because it has a label that says organic, it doesn't necessarily mean it will be better. 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. (O1)

Generally, processed organic food did not feature in any accounts of shopping habits. Lack of trust in this context was a barrier to organic consumption. However, this might have been because food-engaged consumers were deliberately selected.

Support for British agriculture and local produce

Buying local, and supporting British agriculture, emerged repeatedly from the discussions regardless of group. Often the preference for local produce was justified as more trustworthy, or because it had not had to travel far (and was therefore viewed as more sustainable). This was a barrier to buying organic food because much of local produce was 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 get more faith in the food produced at home than I have away. (R4)

Often, feelings associated with local produce were not altogether rational. There was a feeling, sometimes expressed only implicitly, that consuming locally felt right and indicated Britishness, a sense of national pride, and a sense of connection and trust linked to proximity of production. In relation to the trust endowed in local production, there was also the suggestion among regular consumers that lack of trust in organic imports was linked to loyalty to 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. (R9)

Price

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

Budget is the major factor in whether or not to buy organic food. (O1)

With the exception of dedicated organic consumers, there was a view that profiteering in the industry was unjustified and that organic food should be priced more competitively.

If they could bring the price down of organic food I think it would be a really good thing. (N2)

Also, again with the exception of dedicated consumers, most regular consumers selected certain organic products for specific reasons, and to compensate for the higher prices paid for these, the rest of food bought was not 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. (R4)

Regular consumers appeared to have different mindsets towards the organic products they bought and those they did not; these were related to perceptions about specific rewards and benefits. Dedicated regular consumers were less generally cost-sensitive, but other regular consumers were very mindful in their management of food budgets, and had buying strategies to minimise the costs of buying organic food. Over-packaged organic food like deluxe organic biscuits often did not fit into the regular consumer's mindset because they were fancy, overpriced and heavily processed, and missed the point of what organic was really about. However, other raw organic ingredients were considered worth 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. (R2)

For occasional consumers, price was an explicit barrier to consuming more organic food. There was a view that organic food should not be excessively more expensive than conventional produce.

If I had good prices I would probably consume organic food more frequently than I do. (O6)

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

The subset of dedicated regular consumers would attempt to buy as near to all organic food products as they could, and also regularly purchased ecological detergents and organic cosmetics. They targeted specific specialist outlets to satisfy their desire for an extensive range of organic products, and we found them particularly open to experimentation with new products. They would also try to relocate to another shop location to find a specific organic product, and would generally only employ treason as a substitution strategy as a last resort. Dedicated regular consumers expressed their loyalty by choosing to shop in specialist locations, where an extensive range of organic goods were stocked. They were active in the process of research and sought information from labels and specialist publications, and spoke frequently with shopkeepers. They were likely to articulate strong external value-based reasons, such as ethics, sustainability and environmental concern, for their commitment to buying organic food. The majority had an aversion to large supermarkets such as Tesco, and rejected these on principle as potential shopping locations. They rejected conventional food as untrustworthy, positioning organic food as an acceptable and

favourable alternative. This group mostly allocated a large budget for food and some even commented that the cost of most food was artificially low and that consumers ought to pay the real cost of food production.

In contrast, the majority of other regular consumers were more selective in their organic consumption, tending to buy organic food from specific product categories while buying conventional food in others. Thus, a ranking of what is important to buy as organic existed for regular consumers. Some were similar to dedicated regular consumers in their distrust of large supermarkets such as Tesco, and suspected the authenticity of organic products sold in what was perceived as an unethical, profit-driven domain. Regular consumers were sensitive to the price premiums that exist for certain organic foods, and price was a significant barrier to wider organic consumption. It seems that regular consumers' level of loyalty could be viewed through the kind of shops they used, or the locations they chose to shop at. For example, supermarket-orientated regular consumers tended not to seek out specialist shops and generally shopped for convenience and where a moderate range of organic products was available. This in itself limited their organic shopping choices, and also indicated scope for the development of organic ranges in such local supermarkets. Additionally, the level of perseverance and determination to consume organic food was higher among dedicated consumers, who would not be put off by lack of availability in one particular location. Other regular consumers were more likely to experience constraints of contemporary life as obstacles to more extensive organic purchasing.

Products which ranked highly on the organic list for regular consumers were dairy products such as milk and yoghurt. For these, the premium price was viewed as marginal and generally considered worth paying extra for, due to perceived rewards such as health benefits and avoidance of potential contamination. Taste benefits were also significant for regular consumers, and were also central in the development of loyalty for an organic food product. Dedicated regular consumers communicated the most positive conviction about the superior taste of organic food, and were most loyal and rigorous in their organic consumption habits. However, most other regular consumers in our sample were more relaxed about 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 disinclination to look elsewhere.

Occasional consumers generally did not have such loyal organic habits. However, some supermarket-orientated occasional consumers tended to be loyal to a specific organic product such as milk or eggs – which they tried to always buy as organic. They did not choose shopping locations to maximise organic availability and treason was often employed as a substitution strategy. Yet some of them articulated aspirations to consume more organic food and reported lack of availability as a real barrier. Choice of shopping locations tended to be based on convenience for supermarket-orientated occasional consumers. This suggested scope for the development of products for supermarket organic ranges, especially in terms of wider and more abundant availability. Like regular consumers, safety, taste and price featured as important factors contributing feelings of satisfaction about organic food products.

Alternatively-orientated occasional consumers were, in contrast, less loyal to buying organic food, had less routine purchasing habits and were more guided by the context of shopping in farmers' markets where stock, availability and prices change regularly. This subset reported less dissatisfaction with lack of organic availability and appeared content in their shopping habits whether they managed to buy organic food products or not. They had little loyalty based on the principles underlying organic production due to mistrust in the system's ability to produce benefits, and in the validity of the organic label.

Other barriers to loyalty also related strongly to trust. When paying a premium for a product, interviewees liked to believe they were consuming something with an added value. This could take

many forms such as enhanced quality, taste, peace of mind related to food safety, ethical or environmental values, and also enjoyment of the shopping experience.

The barrier of price was a concern for all interviewees, with the exception of dedicated regular consumers. Higher price was a barrier for other regular consumers who want to consume more organic products. Many commented that they expect prices to fall, making a wider variety of products available to them. Occasional consumers and non-consumers commented on the high price of organic food in relation to lack of trust. High prices were seen as indicative of profiteering, and this reinforced existing doubts about the authenticity of organic food.

Finally, a significant barrier to loyalty for all interviewees was the high level of imported organic produce, which was viewed as environmentally unsustainable because it had been air-freighted into the UK and had incurred a high number of food miles. Consequently, this often provided a rationale for treason, and for purchasing locally-produced food that was not organic. Dedicated organic consumers preferred food to be both organic and locally produced. For occasional consumers, the food miles issue reinforced the scepticism they had about external care rewards associated with organic produce; local produce was seen as a positive alternative to organic because it was trusted to deliver greater benefits in this respect.

Chapter 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 suggested that development of their organic food habits was based on their own evaluation of personal and external care benefits, value-based reasons, and practical reasons. Building on the brief discussion in section 2.3.5 of chapter 2 above, we focus now on the experience of certain lifecycle events, media-driven food scandals and how friends and family have had influence on the development of organic food consumption patterns of our interviewees.

5.1.1. Lifecycle events

Lifecycle events recounted as having had an impact on current food habits included the transition into adulthood, a rise in income, pregnancy and the birth of a child, and the experience of illness.

As previously discussed, transition into adulthood appears to have reinforced convictions with regard to organic food consumption. It was at this stage that a deeper sense of responsibility began to be practiced and more care was taken over everyday lifestyle decisions, whether through becoming a property owner, getting married or beginning a family. Importantly, the transition to adulthood involved a change in available financial resources, allowing access to organic products that were previously seen as out of financial reach. This lifecycle change might be seen as a tipping point in the change of mind process. The foundations underpinning the decision that organic food is preferable had already been in place, but more available financial resources brought subtle changes in the practice of shopping, forming the beginning of regular patterns.

According to our interviewees, the lifecycle change which had the most abrupt impact on food consumption patterns was that of pregnancy and birth.

They set up a food coop at work and I did a box scheme and that started it and then I started buying milk too. 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 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. (R2)

For R2 and her partner, with children under five, the experience of pregnancy consolidated and strengthened their original motivations to buy organic food. The arrival of children in the household constituted another tipping point towards more regular and wider organic purchasing habits. Experiences of exceptional sensitivity were recounted during pregnancy, by both regular and occasional consumers. This included 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 was triggered by a first hand experience of the baby's vulnerability at birth, and enhanced awareness of the important role that food plays in health and wellbeing developed.

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. (R2)

The underpinning motivation for this change in food habits was health. However, for other regular consumers with children, pregnancy and the arrival of a baby did not result in 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 had been consolidated during the transition into adulthood.

While pregnancy and parenthood were levers for a change of mind and habits, for such lifecycle events to have had significant impact, consumers tended to have some existing orientation towards healthy eating. The same was true of illness: one regular 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, which brought about radical re-assessment of many aspects of life, of which food was one. Again, illness was not a direct reason for a change in food habits, but a factor within a context which already had some orientation towards healthy eating. For example, the interviewee who had suffered breast cancer came from a family where organic food was consumed regularly, and where childhood food was always healthy and nutritional. Family influences, in conjunction with the experience of illness, brought about a gradual change in mind and habits towards regular consumption.

5.1.2. Family members and friends

Evidence of the influence of friends on the development on organic food habits was considerable: introducing organic food for some and, for others, reinforcing existing organic orientation and conviction. Many accounts included examples in which friends and colleagues had highlighted specific benefits and worthwhile reasons for consuming organically. Much influence was through professional work environments where there was a connection to matters of health, sustainability or the environment. Often, reasons to consume organic food cited by friends and members of reference groups tended to relate to positive external benefits such as environmental sustainability. This operates through reinforcement of pre-existing values and corresponds to the process of research and information gathering. Access to an environment where ideas can be explored and forums for discussion can take place appeared to be important for exchanging knowledge, as well as researching and information seeking. Influence might relate to the identifications people forge with colleagues, and discussions about food might have strengthened such bonds.

The common food habits of couples have indicated how influence could develop within partnerships. One of the strongest accounts of such influences came from the recent spouse of a dedicated organic consumer. He, not the principal shopper in the household, had only recently adopted the organic purchasing habits of his partner and was, prior to cohabitation, a non-consumer.

It was all learning for me, it was a learning experience,... and I obviously 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. (R6-S)

Through experiencing shopping as a common project, and associated discussions about food, he recounted a change in mindset as well as habits.

In other secondary interviews with partners of regular consumers of organic food, a number explained that they did not absolutely share the principal shopper's belief in and commitment to organic food. They did not dramatically contest the consumption of organic food but they asserted clearly that the decision to buy organic food had not come from them. Yet, as the interviews progressed, there were indications that secondary consumers were becoming increasingly active in sourcing organic food themselves. When prompted to discuss reasons for organic consumption, there were moments of re-description, where organic food could be identified with healthy food, already an element of the mindset for organic consumption.

Mention of the influence of extended family was less common, or at least less articulated. However, the role of family members appeared to have been significant in the development of both food mindsets and habits.

For one small subset of regular consumers, parental influence during childhood was explained as having had an impact on later interest in healthy eating, and parents were mentioned as having a strong orientation towards healthy eating. However, many regular consumers recalled their

childhood food as either distinctively unhealthy or not especially healthy. They developed their own set of healthy food preferences in adulthood from influences outside the family. In these cases, negative associations with unhealthy childhood food had been an indirect influence in forging better habits in adulthood. Also, the majority of regular consumers did not have family members who also consumed organic food – or at least, consumed organic food before they did. In some cases, the influence was in reverse, regular consumers influenced their parents to try organic produce. Some regular consumers commented on their parents' view that organic food was overpriced; others had parents whose consumption habits were unchanged from when organic food had become widely available and had not changed to date. Even where parents were referred to as having influenced interviewees to eat healthily, it was unlikely to involve organic consumption but, more usually, a balanced and varied diet including lots of vegetables and fruit.

There were however, a small number of regular consumers whose organic orientation had 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. (R1)

There was also evidence of parental influence on the younger generation. In a secondary interview, a sixteen year-old son of a regular consumer described how he had 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. (R9-S)

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

Occasional consumers also spoke of having been influenced by family members. A couple whose children had left home referred 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. (R6-S)

Another occasional consumer described how he had been influenced by his sister, a yoga instructor deeply influenced by alternative food philosophy; she consumed organic food for personal health reasons as well as the ecological wellbeing of the planet. He, however, was only an occasional user partly due to the barriers of availability and price, but partly also (by implication) because he was not as convinced as his sister that organic really was better.

One non-consumer had parents and siblings who were regular consumers of organic food. As a young single male, studying in London and doing casual work to make ends meet, he suggested that he could not yet afford to adopt organic habits but implied that in the future when he could afford to, he expected that he would begin to buy organic food.

Interestingly, in general (across the three groups) the influence of friends and family was mainly confined to positive aspects of organic consumption, such as the health and environmental benefits, rather than evidence of the negative aspects of non-organic produce. Also, there were very few cases where influence was directly and solely a one-way influence from another person. Influence was largely an experience of reinforcement of some existing preference and often derived from social interaction. Although regular consumers tended themselves to be sensitive about directly influencing others to consume organic food, they reported the influence (albeit indirectly, and with discretion) of others.

5.2. *The influences of external events and agents*

External events occur in a broader social context, including public campaigns about healthy food, or media-driven food scandals (for example, over BSE). These real world events bring attention to health and food safety, and feature in the process of research undertaken by consumers.

5.2.1. Food scandals

Food scandals were reported by interviewees as influencing consumption behaviour, highlighting difficulties relating 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 ... 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. (R3-S)

Responses to food scandals constituted a tipping point which triggered more rigorous sourcing of organic food because awareness of the potential threats of unsafe food to health were heightened. In contrast to conventional produce that might be contaminated, organic food had a good reputation and was 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. (R6)

Memories of the BSE food crisis brought the concept of traceability in the food chain to the forefront, and reinforced desires to have more transparency concerning the origins of food, especially meat.

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. (O4)

Responses to the beef crisis from regular consumers had included the drastic measure of eliminating beef from their diet to minimise any potential risks.

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. (R7-S)

One regular consumer recalled that the BSE crisis had had a significant impact on their food habits and encouraged the family to buy organic beef; it was implied that organic beef (and perhaps organic meat in general) could be trusted and was 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. (R1)

Since organic meat was much less available in the 1980s when concerns about BSE were at their height, not all interviewees began seeking and buying organic meat at that time. However, now that there is more availability of organic and free range meat, current habits were influenced by residual concerns. In fact, many regular consumers interchanged the term free range with organic in terms of meat, and free range meat was often as trusted as organic meat to be safe and good.

The intensity of concerns over life-threatening hazards from problems such as BSE directly threatened consumer trust in food products and had a clear influence on the care taken to source food. This health concern became of even more acute importance at particular stages of the lifecycle.

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. (O3)

This was also an anxiety expressed by regular consumers who were parents and were concerned to protect 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. (R9)

Most regular consumers reflected this cautionary response to the BSE problem by changing their dietary habits, but one exception did not think about food health or safety specifically in relation to organic consumption. Although nutritional factors played a role in this interviewee's diet, organic food was not chosen because of its associated health benefits, but for quality and taste. In relation to BSE,

I don't know it's always in the background, I don't think it would stop me eating beef. (R4)

Occasional consumers mirrored this more laid-back approach, and were less influenced by the media assertion implications of health risks associated with certain types of food.

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. (O5)

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. (O1)

However, there was also one occasional consumer who had, as a consequence of the concerns raised by the BSE crisis, completely stopped consuming beef. She was atypical among occasional consumers in her explicit concern for healthy eating, since there were otherwise minimal expressions of concern for eating healthily, compared to those made by regular consumers. Non-consumers also tended to be less motivated than regular or occasional consumers by health concerns relating to food, and were less influenced by media scandals.

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. (O1)

The BSE crisis really didn't put me off eating beef because I think once you have the crisis it's too late. (O2)

5.2.2. Experts and media

Other mass media influences – apart from scandals – appeared to play a significant role in disseminating information about farming production, specifically highlighting negative aspects of conventional animal husbandry practices as well as potential hazards from genetically-modified

food. Consumers of organic food recalled some general influences from the media, while the most dedicated organic consumers provided examples of specific influential sources. One, for example, recalled a programme about GM food production that he recounted 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. (R3-S)

The programme mentioned by this interviewee had had a major direct impact which reinforced his organic food consumption. Through stimulating thoughts about how food is produced, sourcing organic food then became, in part, an attempt to avoid absolutely any involvement with GM foods. This conviction favouring organic produce was ethical, wanting to avoid products where the company's governance and objectives had negative associations.

Interviewees from all three groups mentioned popular television shows about food and, in particular, the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver. Oliver was often mentioned as having spurred positive change in food practices in the UK. One occasional consumer made specific reference to Oliver's promotion of the benefits of organic food and how his programmes had created a positive image for 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. (O4)

Such popular television programmes were exemplified by mainstream features (documentaries, reality television shows and celebrity cooking programmes). Many interviewees made reference to mainstream television news programmes that raised certain food issues, mentioning scandals as well as more general issues about food production.

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. (O4)

Specific information on organic production from mass media sources (news features, radio programmes, newspaper articles and magazines) were identified as having provided important information for understanding what organic means, and why it is beneficial, as well as having documented problems within the food industry and farming in general. Dedicated and other regular consumers, however, sought more specialist information from outside of 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. (R9)

A few regular consumers made reference to having been influenced by certain publications that they had read, in terms of their awareness of the environment, sustainability and organic food. These included The Ecologist and Ethical Consumer.

I guess magazines that Charlie gets like The Ecologist and the Ethical Consumer ... bits I read filter in. (R2)

Other specific media products mentioned as having been read by more than one interviewee included Felicity Lawrence's book 'Not on the Label' which contains a description of chicken slaughtering and processing plants. This description takes pains to point out that organic chicken follows exactly the same processing method as non-organic. Interviewees who read this account all responded in exactly the same way, by cutting chicken completely out of their diet.

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. (R8-S)

This account of a change of mind identified two separate incidences, of research and of emotional experience, which reinforced and re-described a decision. Reference was also made to resistance (smells lovely) but in the final analysis the negative points outweighed the positive. Furthermore, with reference to chicken, a number of interviewees mentioned a television documentary produced by celebrity chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, a campaigner who characterises battery chicken production as lacking in animal welfare. His programmes endorsed organic and free range chicken as preferable. One occasional consumer reported that since watching the programme he had learnt that it was worth paying extra for an organic chicken. The presenter Fearnley-Whittingstall has assumed 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. (O2)

There have been an increasing amount of documentaries about food. And people are getting more passionate about farming practices, local produce. Like Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall raising awareness on the debate. I've read his book on meat and that's quite informative. (O5)

5.3. First encounters with organic food and changes of mind

Gardner makes a distinction between abrupt changes of mind, and changes of mind that occur gradually over time. In understanding how and why a mind change occurs with respect to organic food habits, it seems that the most common phenomenon was that the change of mind and habits in organic food consumption occurred gradually. Influences were multiple and wide-ranging, so identifying the exact moment of change was difficult to pinpoint with clarity. Most interviewees did not recall their first encounter with organic food. This was in itself significant, as it suggested that organic shopping had become habitual over a reasonably long period of time.

As noted earlier, one regular consumer recalled a farm visit which deepened and reinforced his existing convictions and led directly to organising delivery of an organic vegetable box; and the only interviewee who actually remembered the first organic product purchased was, ironically, a non-consumer. He bought a bar of Fairtrade chocolate which was subsequently recognised as organic.

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 Fairtrade – I think it was the first Fairtrade product... (N3)

He did not go on to develop organic food habits, but sustained his support of Fairtrade products for value-based reasons related to social justice. Thus, first encounters with organic food do not necessarily follow on to become habits. His family background did not encourage healthy eating habits; this might have explained why health was not an important food consideration and consequently why organic food was rejected. One occasional consumer mentioned a family influence in relation to conscious purchase of organic products.

[Because] *for some reason* [partner's name] *thinks organic milk is better than regular milk.*
(O9)

Regular and occasional consumers who described their family background in terms of unhealthy or traditional foods appeared to have had a specific trigger, through education or from an interest in exercise, which brought health concerns into consideration with regard to food.

Few others could pinpoint a specific time when they first started to buy organic food, even where (for example) diet-related or other illness brought about general lifestyle changes. Thus habits appeared to have developed gradually, in response to the increasing availability of organic products at mainstream shopping locations, media coverage of topics related to organic food, and the development of informal social networks where new ideas were channelled and circulated. Influences on changes of mind and habits in relation to the arena of food choice seem to have generally been related to a range of complex value-based reasons that cannot 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.

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

From a lifecycle perspective, the factors which influence regular consumption of organic food included some degree of initial family influence which took place during childhood. In most cases, this form of influence was only indirectly linked to organic food, through encouragement of healthy eating habits, consuming vegetables freshly grown from the garden. Only one regular consumer (the secondary interviewee) had parents who had had organic food habits, and this could be traced as a direct influence on her consumption pattern in adulthood. There were other differences in influences from childhood; not all regular consumers recounted being positively influenced by their parents. Some even described their parents' food habits as unhealthy, and explained how values regarding health, nutrition and sustainability had emerged during adulthood from a variety of other influences. For this group overall, values associated with ecological sustainability were central motivations, with knowledge being acquired through social networks as well as through a variety of mainstream and alternative media. Food habits were most likely to change on transition to adulthood. This was characterised by increasing budgets, and also by cohabitation to form new households. This encouraged responsibilities to be taken more seriously, and more care was taken in the negotiation of food matters. The experience of pregnancy or the expected arrival of a baby strengthened and deepened this sense of responsibility and could have been the trigger for a change in mind about food.

A specific household event which had occurred in changes of mind with regard to regular consumption was related to health concerns. However, only two regular and two occasional consumers mentioned illness as an influence on changing food habits. For the regular consumer who had suffered from breast cancer, experience of this disease had a major influence on her diet and food habits related to organic products changed in very specific product categories. Sufferers from food allergy pointed out that the illnesses themselves were not completely central in their decision to buy organic food, but were one factor among others. Through the process of research

and the experience of sourcing special foods, often from alternative food outlets, interviewees may have been exposed to organic products they had previously have overlooked.

Friends and colleagues also influenced organic consumers. Often dedicated regular consumers belonged to reference groups where organic consumption was part of a broader commitment to the concept of sustainability. Such social networks produced common identifications for organic consumption and provided forums for information exchange which reinforced reasons and expanded knowledge.

Another further influence recalled was the influence of mass and other media sources. Many remembered specific programmes or articles that influenced their opinions about food and food habits. Television programmes highlighting negative aspects of conventional farming and GM production, and also those about drawing attention to positive aspects of organic food, were reported by regular consumers as sources of influence. Radio programmes, books and magazines also featured as having had strong and sometimes direct influence on consumers' habits. Experts, such as celebrity chefs, were cited by a number of consumers as being at the forefront of influence about food in the mainstream media and as having had the impact of encouraging organic food habits. Two consumers who recall reading an article in a particular book stopped eating chicken.

Food scandals, often sensationalised by mass media, played a role in influencing food habits. The BSE crisis of the 1980s was recalled by every respondent in our sample. Some chose to accept the perceived risk and carried on eating beef, but others responded either by attempting to replace conventional with organic beef, or by stopping eating beef entirely. The eggs scandal of the late 1980s also seemed to have impacted on food habits, and many interviewees opted to buy only free range or organic eggs.

Most regular consumers interviewed described 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 slowly, suggesting the process of changing habits was actually quite difficult. Limited availability of organic produce in the past, continuing to the present to an extent in relation to mainstream supplies, posed a barrier to consumption. The steady growth in the organic market in the UK, the expanded product range and changes in the consumption of regular consumers of organic food have followed these patterns.

Chapter 6 Conclusion: the character of demand for organic foods

This final chapter draws on the analysis presented in previous chapters and examines its implications for future demand for organic food in the UK. The discussion mainly concerns the habits of regular consumers, as the group which had developed relatively distinct mindsets about organic food, at least in comparison to the occasional and non-organic consumers interviewed. They were also the group that demonstrated most loyalty and commitment to the organic cause and to organic buying practice.

6.1. Organic consumption as a change of mind and habits

This study has examined Howard Gardner's hypothesis 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). The biographical narratives of consumers in relation to food and food habits were explored in anticipation that a change of mind, in terms of positive support for organic food products, would bring about a change in purchasing behaviour towards organic food. However, actions and habits do not mirror beliefs and opinions in a straightforward manner, because within the real world context of the contemporary organic food market in the UK, consumers with a positive mindset in favour of organic food may not consistently be able to practice the food habits they desire. It has been possible, though, to identify reasons why there might be barriers to organic food consumption.

First, the organic market in the UK has not always facilitated growth in consumer demand. The availability of organic food products across all food categories has not always been complete in mainstream shops, and this has directly influenced consumption trends. Second, interviewees did not always report behaving in a coherent manner, even when they had developed a positive mindset. Regular and occasional consumers of organic food experienced cognitive and emotional barriers to organic consumption, which related to levels of conviction and feelings of trust in organic food.

Interviewees with the most regular food habits did not experience a distinct change of mind about organic food which led to new organic food habits; instead, the beginnings of organic habits related to values that developed, and food experiences that occurred, early on in life, corresponding strongly with values instilled during childhood or early adulthood. Interestingly, change was often unnoticed and memories of the beginning of organic food habits were seldom recalled. This in itself reflected how organic food habits had become normalised over time for regular consumers. This gradual adoption of organic food habits occurred at certain points in their lifecycle, alongside various real world external events which may have constituted important tipping points, rather than a jolting changing of mind. In some cases, though, exposure to media documentaries and reportage on animal welfare issues triggered a shock reaction which constituted an (often acute) tipping point towards organic food consumption.

The dedicated and regular consumers interviewed had strong commitment to organic production, sympathy for ideas relevant to the wider organic movement, and confidence in the benefits of organic food products; these value-based reasons were underpinned by trust that organic production systems deliver the benefits. Trust was strongest among the dedicated consumers who showed most conviction for organic food and were most willing to persevere against the constraints of contemporary life to purchase it.

Since belief in the superiority of organic food products and trust in their authenticity were the main determinants of regular organic habits, it was important then to explore where this trust came from and how it was constructed. Interview analysis showed that trust was intuitively rather than logically founded, and that evidence in support of the perceived benefits of organic food was neither substantive nor analysed in depth. In fact, lack of extensive knowledge about organic food production and farming was a key element of our findings. Consumers appeared to choose to

believe (or, correspondingly, disbelieve) in the benefits of organic food. There was evidence of self-persuasion which came, for example, from the explicit assertion that organic food tasted better, even before it had been tasted. Consequently, it seems that detailed knowledge about organic farming did not inspire trust and was not significant in producing regular organic food habits among the people we interviewed. Value-based reasons which supported organic consumption habits were intuitively fitted into the consumer's general ideological mindset.

Value-based reasons included notions about external care, such as ecological sustainability and animal welfare, as well as concepts of personal care. Value-based reasons relating to personal care included specific reference to the personal health of family members. External care benefits were, conversely, identified outside the domain of the family and concerned a collective common good, strongly related to contemporary debates about sustainability including food miles and climate change. Personal health was at the core of beliefs concerning personal care benefits, and healthy eating featured as a central element in stories of regular and occasional consumers' about the development of their current food habits. Organic food was described as better for personal health, based on the belief that it was pure and unadulterated by residues of pesticides or other chemicals which were detrimental to physical health. Consumption of organic food for both personal care and external care benefits was validated, re-described and reinforced by the experiences of satisfaction with products regarding quality and taste.

Looking more closely at this relationship, personal care involved sustaining future good health and hopefully, longevity; it extends to self and immediate family. External care, though, related to the longevity (and sustainability) of the planet and involved collective engagement. For dedicated, and most regular, consumers, external care was an extension and reinforcement of the personal care value; sustainability of the planet involved taking care of resources and protecting ecosystems for future wellbeing. The mindset which valued life and involved respect and care for people and planet was a driving force for regular organic food habits, and was relatively consistent among regular consumers. These consumers, who linked their organic food habits to collective positive social change, made a political statement through their food habits. However, there were also some supermarket-orientated regular and occasional consumers interviewed who mainly consumed organic food for personal care reasons.

As noted above, adoption of organic food habits developed slowly, alongside gradually developing opinions and evaluations about the benefits of organic food. Once a value-based mindset had developed however, shopping habits did not immediately or automatically reflect it, and accounts consumers gave of the gradual state of changing habits were varied. A mindset favouring organic food was often linked to practical issues such as availability and competitive prices. Many interviewees referred to barriers to shopping organically, such as limited availability, narrow ranges and the issue of the premium organic food prices. Increased consumption levels were reported by interviewees who were aware that prices had become more competitive and availability had increased. For many, changes in income were significant as tipping points in their changing shopping habits, enabling them to achieve their aspirations.

From these interviews, it was also possible to identify a spectrum of organic conviction and, for each level of conviction, variations in beliefs about organic food could be identified. Dedicated regular consumers appeared to have strong faith in the virtues of organic food, and firm convictions that organic food production was fairer, more humane and healthier thus linked to a common social good. As keen researchers, dedicated consumers energetically sought the information they required on food traceability, ecological wellbeing and animal welfare. This was achieved through speaking to shopkeepers and food producers, paying attention to labels and reading articles in specialist publications. Even so, as suggested, knowledge about organic farming and production methods was minimal for all consumers and was not necessarily the inspiration for trust or conviction. Observation of shopping trips suggested that interaction with shopkeepers and producers reinforced

confidence in organic products. Dedicated consumers mostly had the resources to willingly attempt transcendence of the practical barriers such as availability, convenience and price if they could. Dedicated consumers also validated claims about external care and personal care benefits with claims of the superior taste and quality of organic food.

Other regular consumers had weaker overall conviction of the benefits of organic food, although health benefits were claimed for them by all. They were more selective in their organic consumption, and positioned different products within a hierarchy of importance related to personal and external care benefits. The most regularly consumed organic products were those which were believed to differ most from conventional produce, and therefore provided the greatest benefits. Regular consumers tended to have constructed their shopping patterns for convenience, and limited availability inhibited further organic food consumption.

Occasional consumers tended to purchase specific organic food products infrequently and were mostly sceptical of the benefits of organic food. They had a degree of cynicism about the organic production and marketing sector which prevented greater consumption. There was less action to research food products, and less willingness to source desired authentic food carefully. Some occasional consumers gained confidence in food products from interaction with producers at direct points of sale. Occasional consumers sought more information and better labelling to provide reassurance about production and certification of organic produce, especially for products that came from outside the EU. Like regular consumers, occasional consumers were constrained by lack of convenience, high prices and limited availability of organic food.

6.2. Influences on the development of organic food habits

Having discussed changes of mind and their impact on food habits, the focus in this section is now on influences which contribute to them: the role of family, social networks and lifecycle changes; and external events and agents.

Rapid development of the organic market in the UK and its influence on the shopping habits of regular consumers has been a recurrent theme of this report. While this real world event may have been central to the development of organic food habits, it was not the only factor that played a part in their formation. A range of past experiences could be identified as having had powerful influences on development of an orientation towards organic food.

The role of the family appears to have been fundamental. Parental influence on developing food engagement (or lack of it) was found in all the life stories. To some extent, current food habits were a product of a gradual evolution, based on these early experiences. It was possible to identify a number of distinct narrative structures.

In some stories, consumers' current organic food habits and their related values could be positively identified with those learnt through their family, largely conforming to past experiences of parental food values. Such values were mostly related to healthy eating, home-grown and home-cooked food. There was a logical development of adoption, adaptation and development of these values during the lifecycle process. Upbringing and specific parental values concerning health affected organic dietary habits, through vegetarianism and also concern for the ecological wellbeing of the planet. This sort of background had a reinforcing influence on food habits during the stage in adulthood when decisions about food became subject to scrutiny.

For others, the story was of rebellion against traditional modes of food practice. The customary meal of 'meat and two vegetables' was viewed as unhealthy and was associated with working class food habits. Social mobility was relevant to the process of changing food consumption behaviour, and changes can be viewed as a reaction to past family practices. Food habits also expressed social aspirations and indicated changes in social status.

Another story represented in interviews related more directly to health, and described organic food habits as being triggered by personal or family experience of ill health. Such experiences prompted new interest in food, how it affected the body and contributed to the possible causes of illness. Research was carried out to understand how food habits explained or could be ascribed as causes of the experience of illness. Other lifecycle events that influenced organic consumption by strengthening reasons, or tipped interviewees towards organic food habits, included pregnancy and birth, and moving from student to adult life.

One strong channel of influence on the mindsets of these British organic consumers came from mainstream and specialist (sometimes alternative) media. Many interviewees recalled such influences, which invariably highlighted negative aspects of conventional or non-organic food production, rather than the positive characteristics of organic production. It was almost by default that organic food was viewed as an attractive alternative. The shock value was not overwhelming though, as those who were influenced by the media already had some affiliation to organic products, and such influences seem to have constituted a tipping point rather than triggering a drastic change in food habits.

As extreme examples, food scandals stoked by the media also featured in interview narratives, and details were recalled readily. Although such scandals were not always recounted as having a direct impact on their food habits, dedicated and most other regular consumers responded by making temporary drastic changes in food habits, eliminating the risk food completely. Correspondingly, convictions about organic food grew stronger as it was perceived as a safe and healthy alternative. For some regular and occasional consumers, such external events set off alarm bells about conventional production and constituted tipping points which were important in the formation of regular habits.

Regular and occasional consumers also made reference to media coverage of health issues and the role that nutrition played in general health. Health promotion activities, such as the 'five a day' campaign to increase the number of fruit and vegetable portions consumed, were mentioned more as a backdrop to everyday living than as a major influence. In general, interviewees did not speak about maintaining their bodily health or keeping in shape. Body image and aesthetic considerations did not appear to be related to the healthy eating orientation of regular or occasional consumers. While explicit concern for body image has not been a major characteristic of British culture, as has been previously discussed, dedicated, regular and occasional consumers consumed organic food partly because they believed in its health benefits. Those who spoke most about health were either those with an athletic history who mentioned nutrition as an important health concern, those who were at later stages of the lifecycle or those who had suffered illness. Influences on healthy eating habits in this context did not seem to relate to mainstream media but originated from parental influences, and were reinforced through social or alternative health networks or a team of athletes where stories about health and nutrition were exchanged.

As well as external sources of influence on organic food habits, regular consumers were also influenced by incidents that occurred and interaction that took place in their everyday lives. The social domain of work, community groups and word of mouth through friends and acquaintances all contributed to the formation of organic food habits. This kind of influence, in contrast to that of external media, involved positive stories about the benefits of organic food, rather than criticism of other modes of food production, and the communication exchanges which took place reinforced existing beliefs.

Interviewees reported that they were themselves influenced by such familiar channels of communication but, when asked if they would influence others about organic food, most stated that they would not want to interfere with the private matter of another person's food habits. Among dedicated consumers, however, there were reported incidences of direct and deliberate influence of others with specific regard to the benefits of eating organic food. Regular consumers also

influenced others, though less directly, for example, by inviting people to eat organic food at their homes.

6.3. *Barriers to increasing demand*

This section provides a summary of findings relating to barriers to increased consumption of organic food products which might impede the potential development of future demand. Barriers to organic consumption varied substantially among interviewees but two main different types of barrier could be identified. The first were practical barriers, for example, price differences between organic and non-organic food products, availability in supermarkets and the range of organic products available. The second related less to practical obstacles and more to emotional or cognitive barriers, such as belief that organic products fulfilled certain credentials.

The premium prices of organic foods, compared with conventional produce, tended to stop most interviewees (with the exception of dedicated regular consumers) from buying an extensive range of organic food. Dedicated organic consumers also tended to shop in specialist outlets where organic premiums led to pricing which was often considerably above more competitive mainstream prices. They differed from other consumers in their relationship with the price of organic food; in fact, they appeared not to be influenced by price at all and claimed not to be aware of food prices.

However, other regular, occasional and non-consumers all commented that the organic price premium posed a considerable barrier to increased consumption. Not surprisingly, occasional and non-consumers were generally aware of the price differential, and their response was not to buy. However, some occasional consumers would buy organic food when prices were reduced or products were on special offer. Some regular consumers required a drop in price before they would consider extending their organic consumption. For these interviewees, the price premium for certain products posed a definite barrier to consumption; particular reference was made to organic soft fruit (strawberries, raspberries) and certain organic vegetables where the premium was considered unjustifiably high. Their response was to choose specific organic products where the price premium is not particularly large and where they believed that benefits to health will be most notable; for example, root vegetables were believed to absorb high amounts of pesticides, so organic carrots were considered worth paying extra for. Another reaction to premium prices for some regular consumers was to shop in the places perceived to have the most competitive prices, which tended to be large multiple retailers.

However, an emotional barrier for alternatively-orientated regular consumers was a belief that organic food supplied by a supermarket was inauthentic. There were misgivings about ostentatious promotion of organic food in this context, as well as an antipathetic attitude toward the commercialism of supermarkets based on suspicion that excessive profits were being made from supermarket sales of organic products. Even though prices for organic food were generally lower in supermarkets, some preferred to buy organic food from smaller, alternative locations. This barrier of mistrust in supermarket chains who market organic produce (especially Tesco) was based on the perception that, in pursuit of profit, they had no genuine affinity with the values underlying organic production. As Clarke *et al.* (2008: 221) suggest, 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”. Lack of trust also constituted a cognitive barrier to organic consumption with reference to organic produce that was grown abroad, especially outside the EU. Because there was not a single, universal labelling system for organic produce, consumers felt uncertainty about whether they could trust overseas certification and monitoring procedures.

Another barrier affecting increased organic consumption was environmental concern related to the food miles involved in supplying organic food. Many regular consumers attached importance to

environmental sustainability, and were worried by the perception that many organic products (especially vegetables and fruit) were air-freighted into the UK and often came from outside Europe. In this context, the question of whether or not non-organic but locally-produced food was preferable often emerged. Thus, the currently limited assortment of locally-available organic products may constitute a practical barrier to meeting potential consumer demand. Other more general practical barriers related to limitations in terms of product range. Many regular and dedicated organic consumers would have liked to have seen a more extensive range of products in a variety of shopping venues. This included a wider range of fresh organic fruit and vegetables in small greengrocers and farmers' markets. In particular, dedicated regular consumers viewed organic production as a significant, sustainable form of food provision and hoped to see it expand and improve.

6.4. Analysis of potential future demand

The comparison of qualitative interview and observed shopping trips of consumers who, respectively, either consumed regularly, occasionally or never, combined with a broader understanding of the quantitative dimensions of the British organic food market, gives some hints about how future demand for organic food might develop in the future.

Among the people interviewed, demand for organic food products could potentially increase in future, especially in the case of dedicated and other regular consumers, but less so as regards the occasional consumers. Value-based reasons for organic food choice were strong and featured commonly in regular consumers' stories. Further development of organic buying habits could occur if product ranges expand, availability increases and prices fall. Past expansion of ranges and past price falls were viewed in positive terms by interviewees, and most believed that organic prices would continue to become more competitive. Nevertheless, note that dedicated organic consumers, with their strong conviction about the benefits of organic food and commitment to supporting organic production, did not expect or hope for a future drop in organic food prices. Rather, they were typical ecological citizens (like those described in the study by Seyfang, 2006: 390, whose attitude was essentially that "the current price differential between organic and conventional produce is an illusory incentive"). They already consumed a wide range of high quality and speciality organic products, liked to experiment with new organic products and wanted to expand the range they bought, suggesting that as the market develops, they would broaden even these existing habits.

Less convinced interviewees, the other regular and the occasional consumers, however, face more significant barriers, of which lack of trust in the benefits which would accrue from consuming organic food appeared to be the most significant.

This related partly to a mistrust of official structures in general, which is characteristic of British culture. Interviews reflect a public lack of faith in practices of government, and a belief that interests of citizens are not the primary concern of the state. Mistrust was also related to the changing perceptions of organic food by some occasional and non-consumers; once, it may have been accepted as a viable alternative food but, corresponding with Guthman's (2003) suggestion made in her study of organic agriculture in California, organic food has become more "yuppie chow".

Convincing interviewees of the benefits organic food, improving their trust, and attracting them into greater levels of consumption was unlikely to have been achieved through increased information about organic production methods in themselves. However, clearer labelling about regulations and certification procedures, including profiles of particular farmers and verification about the positive aspects of certification, might inspire greater confidence in consumers who already had some affiliation towards healthy, natural and sustainable food. The objections towards supermarket

promotion of organic food, which appeared to be a trait of some interviewees, suggested that future promotions of organic food should be sensitive to this.

In the contemporary context, consumers are becoming more motivated by personal health, and its links to Western diets and lifestyles. Health was certainly a central motivation for interviewees' organic habits and, for many, this related to healthy eating values which were introduced during early years. By extension, the current generation of children and the food values and habits they acquire will influence the future of organic food production, and so food education for both parents and children should be carefully considered; in particular, engagement with non-consumers to increase awareness of the health benefits of organic food.

Some evidence has emerged of 'ecological citizenship' as a personal response to heightened awareness of environmental threats, as well as social injustices created by patterns of international trade. Dobson (2003) defines this as a shared personal commitment to sustainability and suggests that it can be viewed as a driving force for the practice of sustainable consumption. 'Citizen-consumerism' relates to the phenomenon of consumers applying their political values to decisions in the shopping arena. For those who practice 'ecological citizenship', everyday 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 views people as global citizens rather than people of particular states, and citizenly interest is extended to benefit the earth as a whole. Dedicated consumers saw their commitment to organic consumption as one action of citizens outside of the political arena, which highlighted a connection with where food originates, supported small businesses, kept alive a sense of community and addressed social and environmental concerns. This was partly achieved through consumption which spurned dependence on global corporations, particularly supermarkets.

However, this increasing concern appeared to generate conflicts in fulfilling parallel priorities. For example, concern for poor farmers dependent on internationally-traded commodity production and support providing an effective route towards sustainable development for poorer countries conflicted with the desire to localise food supply chains and reduce the impacts of 'food miles'. This may simply have had positive impacts on demand for organic food as generally more sustainable than conventional food products, being less resource dependent and more environmentally friendly. Seyfang (2006) noted that, in 2003, over two-thirds of organic produce consumed in the UK was imported. With rising climate concerns, consumers' environmental aspirations may tip them into prioritising local but non-organic food, if they are unable to buy local organic products. However, more recently, the Soil Association claimed that "approximately 66% of the organic primary produce sold in multiple retailers was sourced in the UK in 2005", implying that the availability of UK-produced organic food in the UK was increasing. If local organic food continues to become increasingly available, it would positively influence future organic demand. Local food can be seen as corresponding to 'ecological citizenship'; Clarke *et al.* (2008) suggested that "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".

Growth in the popularity of local produce will depend partly on motivations consumers have for global social justice issues. Dedicated consumers were the group who were most likely to report buying and supporting Fairtrade products. It is important to note that dedicated organic consumers were specifically targeted by selection procedures, and thus represented a highly motivated group of citizen consumers who are conversant in discourses of sustainable consumption. To the extent that they form a vanguard, future consumption will be influenced by their present concerns and values.

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Appendix: Criteria categorising regular consumers as ‘Dedicated’

<i>Code</i>	<i>Specialist shops chosen for purchases of organic products?</i>	<i>Active search for new arenas (e.g. ethical consumption)?</i>	<i>Networks discussing organic food and mutually reinforcing habits?</i>	<i>Organic food recommended, or influence on people outside close family?</i>	<i>Range of organic products purchased among dedicated regular users?</i>	<i>Organic products excluded due to price premium?</i>
R1	No	No	No	No		Yes
R2	No	No	Yes	No	.	
R3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, vegetables, chicken, soya products,	To some extent (in particular meat products)
R4	No	No	No	No		Yes
R5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		No
R6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes. Fruit, pulses, grains, meat, dairy, vegetables	
R7	No	No	Yes	No		No
R8	Yes	No	Yes	Yes		No
R9	Yes	Yes		No		Yes