



Consumer attitudes towards organic versus conventional food with specific quality attributes

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Abstract

This paper describes the findings from a consumer survey conducted as part of the EU-funded research project QualityLowInputFood (QLIF). The objective was to segment occasional organic consumers with regard to their preferences for organic, conventional and conventional-plus products, i.e., conventional products with a specific attribute that also applies to organic products. In other words, these conventional-plus products are placed between organic and conventional food products. In addition, we aimed at analysing differences between consumer segments regarding their price sensitivity and attitudes towards food. The survey used choice experiments to investigate occasional organic consumer preferences for the different types of products. In subsequent standardized face-to-face interviews we collected data on consumer attitudes towards food that could explain the observed preferences. The attitudes were summarized in attitude factors, using factor analysis. The responses from the interviews and choice experiments were analysed by latent class models. These econometric models were used to identify segments within a group of individuals for their preference structure and to relate membership in each segment to consumer characteristics. Two segments of occasional organic consumers were identified. Consumers in segment 1 strongly preferred organic products and were less price sensitive. Furthermore, consumers in this segment showed a significantly higher level of agreement with most of the investigated attitude factors than consumers in segment 2. The latter consisted of consumers who were significantly more price sensitive and preferred

conventional-plus and conventional products rather than organic products. Communicating quality attributes represents a promising marketing tool of product differentiation and information for both organic and conventional food marketers. The price sensitivity of parts of occasional organic consumers suggests that the perceived price-performance ratio of organic products needs to be increased by targeted pricing and communication strategies integrating product-relevant information. If not, conventional-plus products, representing a cheaper alternative, might be preferred by parts of the occasional organic consumers.

Keywords

- Choice experiment;
- Preference heterogeneity;
- Latent class model;
- Organic food