

Sensory marketing for the organic market

Key Insights from the EU funded Project ECROPOLIS

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Background

The organic food sector in Europe has been growing over recent years. However the development of the organic food market varies across European countries. Highly developed markets (e.g. Germany and Switzerland) coexist with markets in the introductory stage (e.g. Poland).

Sensory marketing strategies are not well implemented in the organic sector, although this market segment comprises consumers with clear preferences for differentiated sensory properties. Sensory attributes are an important element of organic marketing and a possible tool to create a unique value proposition.

Methods

The EU funded project Ecropolis includes an investigation into the organic market in six European countries (Germany, Poland, The Netherlands, Italy, France and Switzerland). Quantitative as well as qualitative consumer research, sensory consumer studies and sensory profiling have been carried out in order to gain information about sensory properties, and consumer expectations and liking of organic products.

Results

Organic taste is influenced by different national preferences. Some product characteristics are disliked in nearly all the countries under study (e.g. semi-solid yoghurt).

With regard to the possible positive influence of organic labeling the impact is different in various countries and product groups. The knowledge, that a product is organic does not lead automatically to higher liking scores. A relevant influence was identified, but even more intense sensory marketing efforts are required to be carried out by producers and retailers. The qualitative consumer research shows that sensory marketing for organic food should be reliable and objective.

To make the results of the project available and understandable for different target groups the Organic Sensory information System (OSIS) database was developed and made available on the website <http://osis.ecropolis.eu> (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Welcome page of the OSIS database

Results (continued)

In OSIS the main results of Ecropolis are summarized for different target groups at different levels: At level 1, a short summary addressed to consumers, retailers and SMEs in English, German, Italian, French, Dutch and Polish is available for different product groups (see Figure 2). A concise overview about specific sensory characteristics for the chosen product groups in the six countries is provided, together with information about consumer habits and sensory marketing for those product groups. OSIS offers a sensory journey through the participating countries to learn about country-specific preferences.



Figure 2: Example for level 1 in OSIS

At level 2 more specific guidance for the practical implementation of sensory marketing and sensory analyses within companies is available in form of fact sheets addressed to retailers, SME and SME associations also available in 6 languages. At level 3 all public research reports are available for the interested audience. OSIS is a unique tool that provides support with ready-to-use information for various questions that arise in organic food production, marketing and communication. Along with OSIS all the Ecropolis project results and dissemination activities are available on the website www.ecropolis.eu.

Conclusions

From a commercial point of view, integration of the range of sensory quality attributes in the product development and marketing has a high potential in the market place, enhancing the added value of organic products.

To augment OSIS it is recommended that producers, associations, retailers etc. work with the researchers involved in this project.

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