

**A STUDY ON CONSUMERS' INTEREST IN PURCHASING BIOLOGICAL PRODUCE**

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**ABSTRACT**

At present, consumers are masters of their incomes. Social stratification differentiates incomes and determines significant variations of the consumption structure. Knowing the attitudinal structure of a consumer is a good opportunity to investigate the causes that determine acceptance or rejection of a produce. The most significant means is to study consumers' wishes. The demand for biological foodstuffs is increasing, and this increase is influenced by some changes in the consumer's behaviour and by the appearance and improvement of a legislative framework in the field. As for the biological produce, they have mainly the same features, the differences residing in type of production and certification type, marking, labelling, storage, advertising – elements that are more strictly stipulated by legal regulations than conventional foodstuffs. Organic farming should not be seen as the only viable solution for the rehabilitation of the entire Romanian agricultural sector but as a niche market with untapped potential in its capacity to be realized. Romanian consumer does not have an accurate perception of what it really is an organic product although it claims to be the actual consumer of organic product.

**Keywords:** biological produce, market, health, taste

**INTRODUCTION**

Biological produce start to replace part of the conventional produce in the diet of more and more people with the increase of the population's interest in both a healthy lifestyle and awareness of the importance of healthy nutrition.

Biological nutrition refers to the consumption of diversified, healthy, residue free produce with a balanced content of high-quality bioactive and mineral substances that contribute to a rational physiological nutrition of the human body.

**MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The present study aims at studying the consumers' interest in purchasing biological produce. The first stage of the study, a quantitative one, consisted in applying a questionnaire to 125 respondents.

**RESULTS**

The results of this preliminary study allowed the identification of socio-demographic features of potential consumers of biological produce. The analysis of demographics of the respondents points out a series of conclusions relevant for the market study. Thus, of the total people questioned, 82% are from the urban area and 18% come from the rural area. As for gender, 38% of the respondents were males and 62% were females. As far as their marital status is concerned, 74% of the respondents were not married and 26% of them

were married. Likewise, 51% of the respondents have a medium level of education and 49% have an academic degree.

**1<sup>st</sup> Question: Do you know anything about biological produce?**

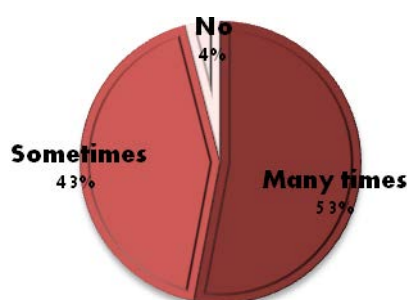
Figure 1 shows that 94% of the respondents have knowledge about this type of produce.



**Figure 1. Level of knowledge about biological produce**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Question: Do you read the information on the biological foodstuff labels?**

The importance of the information provided by the biological foodstuff labels are defining in making a purchase decision: most respondents declared they read in most cases the information on the biological produce label (Figure 2).

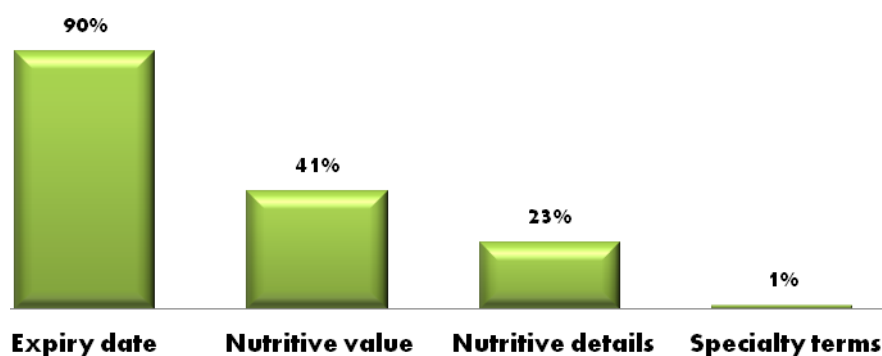


**Figure 2. Frequency of checking the information on the biological produce label**

It is remarkable that over 50% of the respondents read the information on the biological produce label in most cases.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Question: Which of the information on the biological produce label are important to you?**

It is of utmost importance that biological produce labels contain as many information as possible: they should also be useful, as detailed as possible, and easy to identify.



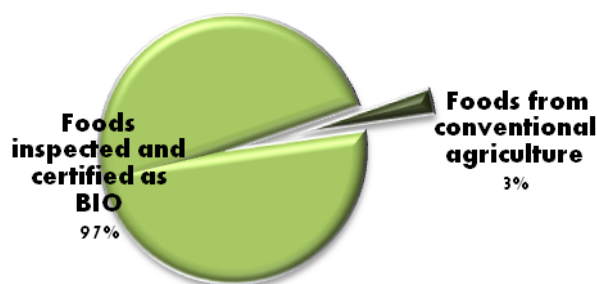
**Figure 3. Hierarchy of information on biological produce labels**

The most important information for the consumers of biological produce at the time of purchasing is the expiry date (*Figure 3*).

**4<sup>th</sup> Question: Which foods do you think are biological?**

Though consumers are not enough informed about biological produce (to be more precise, about biological agriculture), most of them know how to pick the right answer to this question.

Knowing the fact that biological produce are those foods that are inspected and certified as products of biological agriculture is a positive aspect in the development of this sector on the domestic market.



**Figure 4. Degree of knowledge of consumers about biological foods**

Responses to this question show that over 95% of the respondents consider that biological produce are inspected and certified as such, according to specific rules and standards (*Figure 4*).

**5<sup>th</sup> Question: Do you think that biological produce are healthier and tastier than conventional produce?**

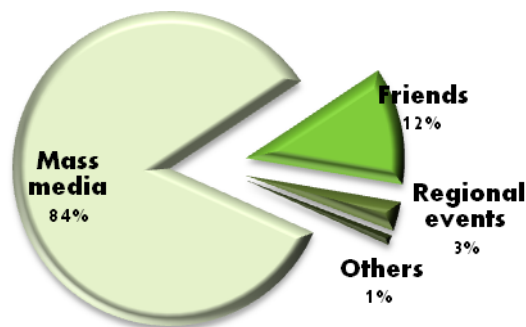
Most consumers believe that biological produce are healthier and tastier than conventional ones.



**Figure 5. Opinion on biological and conventional produce quality**

As shown in *Figure 5*, a significant number of people (87% of the respondents) consider that biological produce are healthier and tastier than conventional ones.

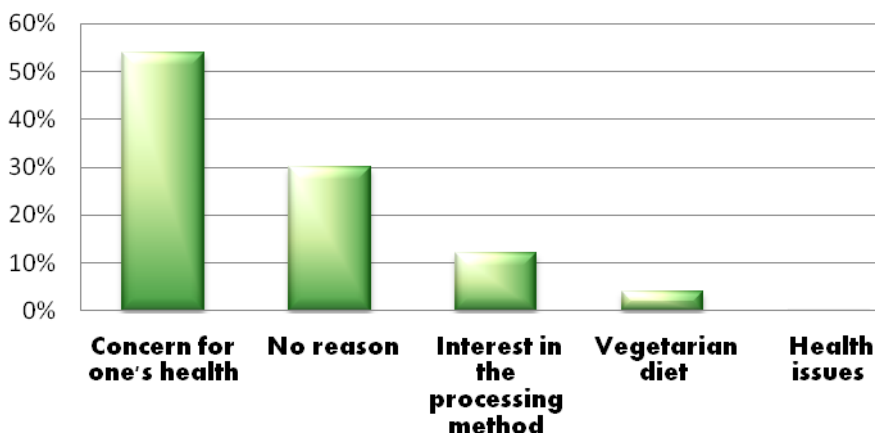
**6<sup>th</sup> Question: *Where did you get most information about biological produce?***



**Figure 6. Sources of information about biological produce**

Most information about biological produce comes from the mass media (TV, radio, Internet, newspapers, etc.) (*Figure 6*).

**7<sup>th</sup> Question: *Why would you purchase biological produce?***



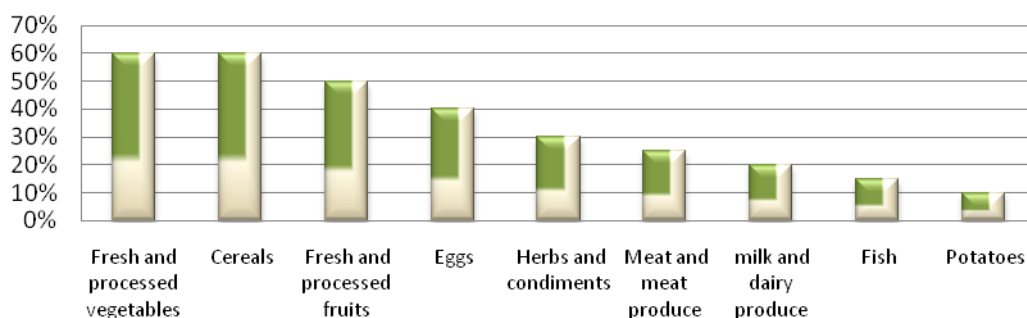
**Figure 7. Reasons for purchasing biological produce**

Taking into account the five variants of answers and the responses to the questionnaire, we can see that the main reason why people choose to purchase biological produce is the

concern for the family health state, while health issues already diagnosed as such were not taken into account at all (Figure 7).

**8<sup>th</sup> Question: Which biological produce would you purchase?**

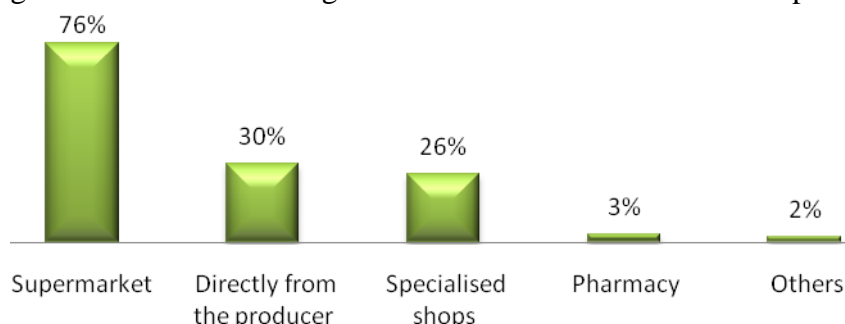
According to the information from our respondents, the most purchased biological foods are fresh vegetables and fruits (60% of the total respondents) followed closely by cereal produce, while the least purchased are potatoes (only 10% of the respondents) (Figure 8).



**Figure 8. Most purchased biological produce**

**9<sup>th</sup> Question: Where would you purchase biological produce?**

Knowing the point of purchase most frequented by the consumers of biological produce contributes positively to the identification of the opportunities for development of the produce range and sale market taking into account the most visited sales point.



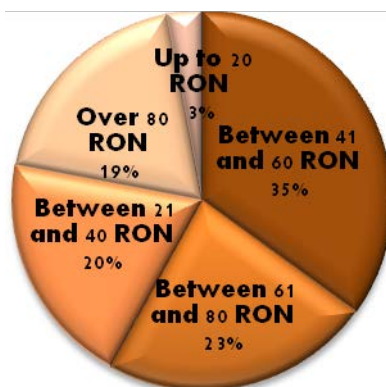
**Figure 9. Purchase points for biological produce**

Of the total respondents, 76% pointed to the supermarkets as their main point of purchase of biological produce; 30% acknowledged they purchase their biological produce directly from the producers; 26% pointed to the shops specialised in the sale of biological produce; pharmacies are preferred by only 3% of the respondents and 2% pointed to other sources (medicinal plant shops, fairs, exhibitions, etc.) (Figure 9).

**10<sup>th</sup> Question: How much would you agree to spend on a monthly basis on biological produce?**

Because the price of these produce is 20 to 50% higher than that of conventional produce, the monthly budget destined to the purchase of these produce is rather low, hence the low level of biological produce consumption.

Low purchase power reflects directly in the consumption decision and Romania is among the countries with a low purchase power.



**Figure 10. Financial availability for the purchase of biological produce on a monthly basis**

Though this sector has started to increase on the domestic market and to be of interest for consumers, from the point of view of financial availability we can see the following: 35% of the respondents would spend up to 60 RON monthly on biological produce; 23% would spend between 61 and 80 RON per month on such foods; 20% would spend only up to 40 RON/month; 19% would spend over 80 RON on biological produce; and only 3% would spend only maximum 20 RON on biological produce (*Figure 10*).

## CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account all these elements, we can say that the biological produce sector is of potential interest; getting aware of the benefits of consuming such produce is increasing among consumers; what we need in purchase decision-making is more advertising and, above all, a stronger purchase power (CONSTANTIN, 2009; POP, 2009; GÎNDU ET AL., 2013). This sector of produce is accessible only to people with a monthly income above the average while in Romania people earn minimum wages on economy, which is not enough for a regular consumption of biological produce.

Biological produce are the result of biological agriculture, a farming system that observes the general principles of environmental protection and of human safety.

To conclude, we would say that “BIOLOGICAL CONSUMPTION IS A NECESSITY, NOT A TREND” – meaning it is not just a matter of price.

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