

Trusting is good? Hints from an exploratory survey on trust in agri-food professions

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Abstract

Trust is considered a fundamental requisite for markets to work properly. In 2014, GFK Verein published a study that measured the trust of ordinary people from 25 countries of the world towards over 30 professions. In almost all the countries surveyed farmers are among the professions in which people trust more.

Moving from this evidence, the paper presents a preliminary exploration on the level of trust for different professions of the agricultural and food chains in Italy.

An explorative analysis has been carried out through a questionnaire submitted to a group of university students. The people interviewed confirmed that professions involved at different stages in the agri-food chains receive a high degree of trust: among these: farmers (83%) are the most trusted in, followed by chefs (78%), wine producers (75%), organic farmers (72%), and butchers (70%). Results are commented and possible practical implications are discussed in the final section.

Keywords

trust, farmers, agri-food professions, survey,

Introduction

On the role of trust in economics

The attention to trust in economic thought has varied through time.

At the dawn of modern economics, trust was considered as a sort of fundamental ethical precondition for markets to work properly. According to John Stuart Mill "the advantage to mankind of being able to trust one another, penetrates into every crevice and cranny of human life: the economical is perhaps the smallest part of it, yet even this is incalculable." (quoted in Knack, 2001, p. 33). Going back a century before Mill, Antonio Genovesi, an Italian priest, philosopher and in 1754 first professor of the newly founded Chair of Political Economy in Naples, in his main work "Lezioni di Economia Civile" (Lessons of Civil Economy)

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addressed a fundamental importance to trust. In the thought of Genovesi there is a substantial difference between private trust (that is the reputation, a private good that can be “spent” on the market) and the public one which it is not the sum of the private reputations, but includes also love and empathy to the commons. It is a concept close to what we currently call social capital, that is the fabric of trust and civic virtue that makes the human and economic development maintained over time (Bruni and Sugden, 2000).

In an interdependent, social and relational species, as we are, trust and distrust reflect the limited capacity to foresee others behaviour (Krueger and Evans, 2013). This is why behavioural economics is probably the field of economics that has dedicated more attention to trust and related concepts.

This is not the place for a comprehensive discussion on how trust and trustworthiness have been taken into account in the economic debate since then. But coming to our time the growing interest in behavioural economics and in particular of its “trust game”, largely applied to test and measure trust across countries and in several different cultures, together with the economic downturn that took hold since 2008 and still affects some industrialized countries, have increased the efforts in understanding the linkages between trust, growth and economic wellbeing.

So, after a rather long time during which trust was mostly considered as a “background environment” of economic life (Dasgupta, 2000), in the last decade there has been a growing interest in trust believed as a requisite for social capital.

Different types of trust can be imagined as relevant to the economic discourse. A distinction could be drawn among three different connotation of trust: trust given by single individual to others more or less close to the subject, trust given to others in general, and trust in institutions. Trust, related to economic decisions, is also relevant with respect to time and in particular to the future, next or far.

Economists have recently intensified their attention on the role of trust in economics due to the long period of economic stagnation, or negative economic growth. An ample literature on trust in economics has concerned its role in explaining macroeconomic performances in modern societies, mostly through the connection between the levels of trust with the stock of social capital (Fukuyama, 1995). Although the idea that trust and social capital have a direct impact on growth is largely debated (Dasgupta and Serageldin, 1999), and given that cultural diversities may play a relevant role, there is a wide consensus in the economic literature that trust plays a central function in market economies. This is confirmed by the many efforts to measure the level of trust in developed as well as in developing countries, and across time².

Food markets represent a sphere in which economists have been more sensitive to the trust issue (Anania and Nisticò, 2004). An ample literature have studied the linkages between food markets trends and consumers trust, a topic on which research has been carried out at European level (see Romano and Stefani, 2007). In general these studies do not consider

² An original field of studies is the so called “neuroeconomics” that with reference to trust focuses on the role of oxytocin, a mammals hormone (Zak, 2005).

explicitly and directly the situation of trust and trustworthiness that occurs among consumers and farmers, that is the topic we have tried to investigate.

In the paper we have focused on the kind of trust generally known as “horizontal” (i.e. trust in others) to be distinguished from the “vertical” trust, that refers to trust in institutions that we have not considered.

Among the many studies that have been carried out on the measure of interpersonal or horizontal trust, one that caught our attention for its approach and results is the “Trust in profession, 2014” conducted by GFK Verein.

This rather simple survey, whose main results are presented in the next paragraph, has aimed to measure the level of trust that citizens have in various professions. This assessment is relevant due to the many implications that trust issues have with the functioning of institutions of the markets and of the entire society.

The objective of our paper is, more narrowly, to explore trust issues related to professions involved in the food chains, compared with non-food related professions.

Measuring trust in professions

In 2014 GFK Verein, a German non-profit organisation for the promotion of market research, published the results of an ample survey on the level of trust people have in different professions in several developed and developing countries.

Over 28,000 people were interviewed in 25 selected countries in Europe, North and South America, in the Asia/Pacific region and in Africa. According to the authors of the survey, those questioned represent 2.2 billion people worldwide.

The study ascertained the trust in 32 different professions that are present in all the countries involved.

People were asked for each profession to declare their degree of trust choosing among a four-option Likert scale (plus a “no comment” option). Two of the possible responses were considered indicators of trust (“fully” or “generally”), while the other two of distrust (“much” or “complete”). The results of the study have been published quantifying the percentage of individuals who declare to trust (fully or generally) each profession.

The principal results of the GFK survey may be summarized as follows:

- *firemen* is the most trusted profession (90% declare complete or general trust),
- professions related with the social, education and health sphere (*paramedic, nurse, doctor, teacher*) are at the higher degrees of trust, just after *fireman*;
- *politicians* are largely the most distrusted in 23 out of the 25 countries. On average only 31% of all persons interviewed have full or relevant trust in this profession.

One of the professions considered in the study is the *farmer*, recognized as a distinctive working activity with respect to the more generally defined *entrepreneur*, and so considered as separate professions.

With some surprise, *farmers* resulted among the professions more trusted, being, globally, at the 6th position in the ranking by trust (86%). In 22 countries *farmers* are ranked in the ten most trusted professions, far ahead of *actors, policemen* and even *priest* and *pastors*.

The GFK study reveals that the level of trust people have in *farmers* is rather homogeneous across countries, showing a coefficient of variation of 11,7%.

The goals of the research

Moving from the GFK survey, our research seeks at exploring to what extent consumers, and more generally citizens, trust some professions of the agri-food chains. The results, though partial and preliminary, will hopefully shed some light on the factors that may influence people's attitude towards the primary sector. The relevance of the issue rely on one side, on the particularly intimate relationship that every human being has with food and, on the other side, with the fact that food production is increasingly perceived as a black box (Lockie and Kitto, 2000). While there are many pieces of literature aiming at exploring the complex relationship between consumers' and food, and between consumers and firms or their brands or other kinds of labelling, the level of trust people have on different professions involved in the food chains is a perspective far less explored.

The paper is to be considered as a very first attempt to address the theme and basically seeks at raising some interest on this way of looking at relations between consumption and production. Our idea is that the level of trust on a product is, at least partly, a consequence of how much the producers (or the professions) show trustworthiness. Seen it in this way, it is clear that the issue may be relevant in better understanding the functioning of food markets.

The article continues with the presentation of material and methods adopted; the next section shows results of the survey. Some final remarks conclude the paper.

Materials and methods

The paper presents the results of a survey based on a questionnaire proposed to 204 university students. The survey took place during December 2014. The research is purely exploratory and results shall be considered as preliminary both due to the novelty of the topic as well as to the simplicity of the questionnaire and to the small number of interviewees that do not form anyhow a representative sample of the Italian population. People in the sample were chosen in order to be able to compare students enrolled in courses related to agriculture and food to those with no enrolled in other kind of courses. Furthermore, different linkages with the primary sector (i.e. profession of the parents and other family relations, previous studies) have been assessed in order to explore eventual differences in the level of trust towards the related professions.

The students were asked to fill in the questionnaire by peers during intervals between courses, in order to avoid the impression that they were going to be evaluated on this and that there were right and wrong answers. Questionnaires were left to them and then collected after about 30 minutes, with no interaction between interviewees and interviewers. The questionnaire includes a few preliminary and general questions on the role of trust in daily life. Then it asks to express the level of trust given to 15 professions³ among which 5

³ The professions considered are the following: (non food related) *artisan, doctor, fireman, football player, journalist, judge, mayor, nurse, parliament member, teacher*, (food related) *farmer, organic farmer, wine producer, butcher, chef*.

refer to the agri-food sector. While the *farmer* profession is the same as in the GFK study, we have considered also four more specific agri-food professions: *organic farmer*, *wine producer*, *butcher* and *chef* in order to explore trust in the entire food chains. In particular the choice of measuring trust to organic farmers refers to a possible ambiguous attitude toward this profession. From one side *organic farmers*, if seen as being more responsible toward the environment, may be considered by consumers more trustworthy than *farmers* tout court. On the other side, the organic character of food, being a credence attribute, may induce in consumers a distrust feeling as the one often addressed to organic food certification bodies (Hughner et al., 2007). This sentiment towards organic food may, obviously, be transferred to professions responsible of its production.

Wine producers have been included as they somehow belong both to agriculture and the processing stage of the production process. *Butchers* represent stakeholders of the food chains that come in direct contact to the final consumers but at the same time are seen as retailers more that producers; furthermore, in our view it is particularly interesting to explore trust in the meat sector that have been deeply affected by safety emergencies in the last decades and, thus, have faced disruptions in trust levels. Last, *chefs* have been included for two different reasons: on the one side as they became largely popular in the last years to the ide public thanks to famous TV programs; on the other side we chose chefs because they are basically and directly associated to experience attributes of food so that we thought that it would have been interesting to see whether this circumstance affects trust.

The levels of trust expressed by interviewees towards the 15 professions were coded in a Likert scale from 1 (no trust) to 4 (full trust) plus a "don't know" option.

Data collected have been processed via simple descriptive statistics. The T-test and the Chi-squared test have been calculated in order to assess significant differences between means and frequencies of different features in sub-samples. Also, a K-mean cluster analysis has been used to find groups of respondents with different attitudes towards the target phenomenon and to find out eventual relationships between their answers and their personal features. This have been run with IBM-SPSS version 20 using Euclidean distance, Ward method.

The interviews have been targeted at young persons (average age is 21.6 with about 90% between 19 and 24 years old), evenly distributed between males (99) and females (105), with a higher education level and with at least some knowledge about the primary sector. This is why the survey took place in a small university town: Viterbo. The town is placed in a rural area, where agriculture is still relevant and occupies a less marginal role compared to the Italian average (the share of agricultural value added is respectively around 5% and less than 2%). The bias of the sample towards students enrolled in courses focused on agriculture (47) and food related matters (38), is clearly intentional, due to the goal of the survey. Including in the sample also students from different kind of courses (119) allows for wider comparisons. Personal relationships with the primary sector have been also explored under different perspectives such as: having parents that work in the primary sector (36) or via different kind of direct experiences (101) including having an orchard, some olive trees, a country home, etc. The idea was to explore whether these features - that are somehow connected with a better knowledge of agricultural activities - could led to a different attitude towards the producers.

Results

Descriptive statistics

A first overview of aggregated results is presented in Table n. 1, where average scores, given to the key issues investigated with the different questions, are shown together with standard deviation, variation coefficient and missing values.

Trust is considered important in our sample, with a high mean score of 3.36 out of 4 and a low level of variability in responses. Noticeably, and not surprisingly, this very general issue got the highest score. The overall trust assigned to the 15 professions targeted in the survey was definitely lower than that, with 2.48. When divided in two groups, one with agriculture and food related workers, and the other with the remaining professions, the level of trust differentiates. The five professions related to agriculture and food score 2.76 (CV=0.206), while the others all together scores 2.35 (CV=0.152) and the difference is systematically in favour of each profession in the first group and it is overall statistically significant⁴. As in the study *Trust In Professions* (GfK Verein, 2014), also in our study *firemen* are at the top of the ranking (3.32), followed by *artisans* (3.01), although in this case there is a high share of missing values (16 persons) that seems to indicate that these interviewees feel they cannot assess any trusting level, probably due to a lack of knowledge and/or of direct experience. *Farmers* are in the third position (2.96), closely followed by *teachers* (2.93), a profession role that students know better (4 missing values against 8 in case of *farmers*). Level of trust for *doctors* and *nurses* are well aligned (2.85 and 2.86, respectively). *Judges* are in an intermediate positioning while all the remaining professions reach lower scores. *Members of parliament* close the ranking (1.10) while *football players* collect the highest number of "don't know" answers (38).

The five agri-food related professions included in the survey scored quite high though there are not negligible differences among them. First, it is interesting to pinpoint that *organic farmers* are trusted far less than *farmers* tout court (2.96 vs 2.71, a statistically significant difference). To some extent this outcome can be seen as a consequence of the diffidence with which some persons consider organic produce. In other words, it could be interpreted as a shift to the producer of a sort of distrust on organic produces. This suspicious attitude is somehow related with the nature of "credence" attribute of being organic as this is not directly verifiable by consumers.

There are other significant differences among the trust levels gained by the five professional profiles in the agri-food sector. *Farmers* scored significantly better than *wine producers* (2.96 vs 2.60) as well as *butchers* (2.96 vs 2.70). The *chef* outperforms *butchers* (2.83 vs 2.70) and *wine producers* (2.83 vs 2.60). Higher scores obtained by *chefs* may be related with the greater importance of experience attributes in *chefs* work as, in other words, what they are first supposed to deliver are good meals and this is what people basically focus at when thinking at this profession. The results of their work is, then, directly evaluable with small margins for cheating.

⁴ Always assessed via T-test, calculated with the t.test function in excel. Significant values have been considered values of the T for which the probability to be wrong in accepting H_0 is 5% or lower.

Table 1. Overview of the sample: average values and variability

	average (1)	standard deviation (2)	(1)/(2)	missing values*
Importance of trust	3.36	0.839	0.250	5
Overall trust (15 professions)	2.48	0.356	0.143	0
All non food	2.35	0.358	0.152	0
Fireman	3.32	0.790	0.238	5
Doctor	2.85	0.696	0.244	1
Journalist	1.96	0.718	0.367	2
Teacher	2.93	0.722	0.247	4
Judge	2.22	0.948	0.428	7
Artisan	3.01	1.060	0.352	16
Major	1.75	0.768	0.438	8
Football player	1.48	1.043	0.707	38
Nurse	2.86	0.666	0.233	0
Member of N. Congress	1.10	0.510	0.463	10
All food related	2.76	0.569	0.206	0
Farmer	2.96	0.856	0.289	8
Organic Farmer	2.71	0.962	0.355	11
Wine producer	2.60	1.189	0.457	29
Butcher	2.70	0.810	0.300	5
Chef	2.83	0.797	0.282	6

* Includes blanks and "Don't know" answers

Source: own elaboration on data from the survey

With the help of Table 2 it is possible to understand which personal features, among those explored with the questionnaire, significantly affect the attitude towards trust. A first segmentation of the sample follows gender: males and females show basically the same attitude towards trust but for *butchers*, *firemen* and *nurses*, all trusted more by males than by females. A second dimension used for segmenting the sample comes from the kind of profession of the parents whether it is linked to the agri-food sector or not.

Looking at the sample in this way renders some new insights: students with no parents in the agri-food sector have an overall higher level of trust on the 15 professions proposed; this higher confidence is due to their attitude towards non agri-food professions, while the average scores of trust given to agri-food professions is not significantly different.

A third line of segmentation follows the kind of university degree the students are enrolled in. In this case we have three groups: one including students enrolled in the agricultural degree, a second one with students in courses related to food production, and the third including all other students. This segmentation shows that there are many differences in trust levels between students of agriculture and students in the group of mixed courses. These differences concern the three professions related with agriculture that gain higher scores from students in agriculture. Differently, student in food related courses do not trust more *butchers* and *chef* compared with the other two groups of students. Other differences among the groups of students are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. testing the influence of personal features on trusting

	Females	Males	Non AA Parents	AA Parents	CdL Non AA	CdL A	CdL Food
Importance of trust	3.43	3.28	3.33	3.47	3.39	3.34	3.26
Overall trust (15 professions)	2.44	2.53	2.51	2.39	2.46	2.53	2.51
All non food	2.32	2.38	2.38 (*)	2.22 (*)	2.35	2.33	2.36
fireman	3.19 (*)	3.46 (*)	3.39 (*)	3.05 (*)	3.33	3.21	3.45
doctor	2.87	2.83	2.91 (*)	2.58 (*)	2.83	2.87	2.87
journalist	1.97	1.94	1.98	1.84	1.97	1.96	1.92
teacher	2.86	3.00	2.94	2.87	2.86 (*)	3.11 (*)	2.92
judge	2.23	2.20	2.28 (*)	1.92 (*)	2.29	2.04	2.18
artisan	3.03	2.99	3.07	2.76	2.90 (*)	3.11	3.24 (*)
major	1.80	1.71	1.76	1.74	1.85 (*)	1.62 (*)	1.63
football player	1.37	1.59	1.47	1.50	1.55	1.38	1.34
nurse	2.75 (*)	2.98 (*)	2.88	2.79	2.79 (*)	2.98 (*)	2.95
member of N. Congress	1.10	1.10	1.10	1.11	1.13	1.02	1.11
All food related	2.70	2.83	2.77	2.73	2.68 (*)	2.92 (*)	2.81
farmer	2.90	3.01	2.92	3.11	2.82 (*)	3.23 (*)	3.03
organic Farmer	2.67	2.76	2.70	2.76	2.62 (*)	2.91 (*)	2.74
wine producer	2.48	2.74	2.65	2.39	2.45 (*)	2.96 (*)	2.63
butcher	2.58 (*)	2.82 (*)	2.72	2.58	2.65	2.72	2.82
chef	2.85	2.81	2.84	2.79	2.85	2.79	2.82

(*)indicates statistically significant differences in the mean values

Source: own elaboration on data from the survey

The Cluster Analysis

In order to get more insights on how the attitude towards trust is distributed in our sample, a cluster analysis was performed on a selection of the information gathered with the questionnaires. This selection includes: i) the importance generally given to trust in

relationships among human beings; ii) the average level of trust assigned to the 10 professions other than those of the agri-food sector; and iii) the level of trustworthiness assigned to each of the 5 agri-food professions considered.

Based on these variables a two-step clustering was first run, suggesting that three is the optimal number of clusters. Afterwards, a k-mean cluster, based on the same variables, was run for a partitioning of the sample into three groups. Results are shown in Tables n. 3 and n. 4, where Table n. 3 is the ANOVA table and the F-statistic assesses the role of each variable in obtaining the partition of the sample⁵. The variable that played, by far, the most important role in creating the groups is the level of trust assigned to *wine producers*. At a distance there are *organic farmers* and *butchers*, with the others following with minor roles. Table n. 4 reports the average scores of trust assigned by students in each group to the different professional categories.

Table 3. Output of the Kmean Cluster Analysis: ANOVA Statistics

variables	Cluster		Error		F	Sig.
	Mean Square	df	Mean Square	df		
Importance of Trust	11.065	2	.601	201	18.419	.000
All non agro-food	.754	2	.122	201	6.187	.002
Farmer	9.988	2	.640	201	15.609	.000
Organic Farmer	20.604	2	.730	201	28.225	.000
Wine Producer	105.915	2	.373	201	283.823	.000
Butcher	14.296	2	.520	201	27.481	.000
Chef	7.836	2	.564	201	13.899	.000

Source: own elaboration on data from the survey

We named the first group “The Mistrustfuls”. These are 38 students that share the feature of a low level of trust towards any kind of professions. As they scored 2.2 the professions other than the ones in the agri-food (Table n. 3) and gave generally lower scores of trust to the agri-food professions. In particular, they find *wine producers* poorly trustable with an average score of 0.5 on the 5 points scale. In this group we find the 29 missing answers related to *wine producers* that we interpret as a sign of lack of knowledge and/or experience on this profession. Also *farmers* and *organic farmers* get very low level of trust from these group (scores are, respectively, 2.3 and 2.0). Looking at the personal characteristics of these students (that have not been considered for the cluster analysis) we get some additional interesting insights. Here we find the higher share of women and of persons studying Food Technologies (in both cases, about two third of the group) and by far the lowest share of students following courses not related to the agri-food sector (10.5%). In addition, students with parents that work (or have worked in the past) in the primary sector are also more frequent here (Table n. 5).

Table 4. Final Cluster Centers

⁵ It is worth to recall that in clustering the F-test should be used only for descriptive purposes because the clusters are chosen to maximize differences among cases in different clusters.

	Clusters		
	The Mistrustfuls	The Trustfuls	The Cautious
Importance of Trust	3.3	3.0	3.7
All non agro-food	2.2	2.4	2.4
Farmer	2.3	3.2	3.0
Organic Farmer	2.0	2.5	3.2
Wine Producer	.5	3.1	3.1
Butcher	2.5	3.2	2.4
Chef	2.5	3.2	2.7

Source: own elaboration on data from the survey

The other two clusters are clearly distinguished from the first one and generally more similar to each other. Students trust for both professions, in the agri-food and non agri-food sectors, are well aligned. However there are some differences that allow labelling them as the "Trustfuls", with 79 persons in it, and the "Cautious", that gathers 87 persons. The "Trustfuls", with respect to the "Cautious" show (Table n. 4) generally higher level of trust except for *organic farmers* that are regarded with a relatively lower level of confidence (2.5 points vs 3.2).

As for this last group, we argue that a certain attitude of distrusting professions within the agri-food sector - and especially to food processors - may have led them to rely more on *organic farmers*, seen as those who carry on an alternative more genuine way of producing food and of interacting with the environment.

Table 5. Personal features of people in the groups

	Share of males	Share of Students in other degrees	Share of Food Tec. Students	Share of Students in Agriculture	Share of Students with parents in Primary sector	Share of Students with other personal direct relations with the Primary S.
The Mistrustfuls	34.2	68.4	21.1	10.5	21.1	44.7
The Trustfuls	57.0	54.4	17.7	27.8	13.9	45.6
The Cautious	47.1	57.5	18.4	24.1	19.5	55.2

Source: own elaboration on data from the survey

The personal characteristics of people in these two groups are also similar to each other and basically more differentiated with respect to the "Mistrustfuls" group. Here we find a higher share of males and students enrolled in university degrees not related to agri-food fields (see table n.5) as well as a lower proportion of people with other personal relations with the primary sectors. In addition, it is worth to pinpoint that among the two clusters, is the "Trustfuls" group that presents the lowest levels of connections with the agri-food sector, considering both the university degree and the other kind of relations with it.

Summing up, it might be argued that a better knowledge and stricter connections to the primary and the related sectors are generally associated with an greater trusting attitude.

Conclusions

The analysis presented represents a first attempt to raise the interest of the scientific community on the theme of trust on professions related to the agri-food sector. Although limited in terms of societal segments considered – a small number of university students - the survey provides some interesting preliminary insights. First of all, it appears to be confirmed – at least for university students - the general outcome that *farmers* rely on a relevant asset of trustworthiness. Further research should be undertaken to a better understanding of the reasons for which trust to *farmers* is generally high, in particular greater than the one given to *non-agricultural entrepreneurs*. Preliminary hypothesis that could be tested and verified to identify factors that induce people in trusting *farmers* are related to the small and family character of most agricultural households. This seems to be confirmed by the high level of trust that is also assigned to *artisans*, another category that usually operates in small business where interpersonal direct relations are relevant. Moreover, the multifunctional dimension of agriculture, the fact that farmers deal with living beings and are often seen as responsible guardians of the countryside, of biodiversity, of the environment, or even of the rural traditional, heritage may play a role in building trust.

Besides confirming the evidence shown with the survey by GfK Verein, our analysis brought a quite surprising outcome: within the broad category of farmers, the more narrowly defined one of the *organic farmers*, a growing profession in the country, is less trusted. It looks as if they have to demonstrate more in order to get comparable level of trust. We suggest that this may be related to the peculiar quality feature of their products: adding a credence attribute to the products, as the organic quality is, this profession is regarded as to be in the position of potentially taking advantage of the asymmetric distribution of information and, thus, cheating.

Such evidence needs to be verified with further investigation, but should be seriously taken into account by *organic farmers'* organizations that often assume its members as intrinsically "better" *farmers* tout court. An additional communication effort to assure citizens and potential consumers of the genuine commitment of *organic farmers* in respecting the production specifications of the EU Regulation of organic farming and of the effectiveness of the control system may be the strategy to build more trust.

Furthermore, an additional insight from our survey is that direct knowledge of people in a profession helps in building trust. This is shown by the low level of trust received by the wine producers among professionals related to the agri-food sector, but also by the different level of trust associated to students with different degree of relationships to the sector. This result led to consider further beneficial impacts of measures within the EU rural policy such as those that are aimed at taking children and other citizens in rural areas and in farms.

Finally, another outcome that deserves some attention is that trust, just like other human feelings, is subject to irrationality and incoherence. This is the case of the high level of trust

received by *chefs*: when we think of *chefs* our attention is focused in sensorial features of food and we tend to think less on credence attributes that are, however, always there and important, for example to our health, just as usual.

Although the amount of trust that “circulates” is influenced by cultural differences that changes in the long term (Knack, 2001), there is no doubt that it can fluctuate dramatically in the short term due to external as well as internal factors with respect to the agri-food system.

If, from a side, sectorial policies, as the CAP, can contribute in limiting the role of trust in agricultural and food markets, they cannot lowering to zero. From the *farmers* point of view there should be a greater awareness of (i) the consistent level of trust that on the average people seem to recognize to their profession, (ii) the fact that level of trust is not given and fixed but it is affected by their behaviour both at individual and collective level. More in general, all the stakeholders of the food chain should better understand how trust is constructed and/or maintained, being, together with loyalty and quality the “engine of markets competitiveness and growth” (Boyer, 1993).

Further investigation could consider to measure trust given to agri-food professions in other groups of population, with different age, income level, rural or urban character, and so on.

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