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## Consumers in Trinidad and Tobago: Value Seekers or Quality Seekers? The Case of Fresh Tomato

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**Abstract.** As income levels and knowledge of food safety increases, consumers are more deliberate in their purchasing decisions. This study examined the factors that influenced consumers' purchasing decisions relating to the quality of tomatoes. A convenient sample of 373 consumers was interviewed with a structured questionnaire. Results indicated that price was the highest ranked attribute. Factor analysis permitted a decision rule used to separate consumers into value seekers and quality seekers. Income, education and gender were significant predictors of the probability that a person is a quality seeker. Agricultural stakeholders must pay increased importance on quality attributes to satisfy changing demands.

**Keywords:** Quality; Value; Attributes; Preferences; Tomato.

## INTRODUCTION

Agrifood markets in both developed and developing countries are in an unprecedented state of flux. Supermarkets, the major buyers and sellers of food in developed countries are rapidly expanding their global presence (Arda, 2006). A few of the commonly cited reasons for the transformation being observed are: urbanization, market liberalization, technological advances such as microwave ovens, freezers and refrigerators, more women in the workforce, increasing concerns of environmental health and rising per capita incomes.

Changing consumer purchasing patterns worldwide are influencing how food is produced, packaged, prepared and sold. With rising per capita income, diets tend to shift from basic staples to include more fresh fruit, vegetables and protein. Consumers are therefore major dictators of what upstream actors in the food value chain must do if they want to first survive, much less prosper. Kinsey (2001, p.1) stated “Delivering value to their consumers is the business of every business. In the food business, value consists of many ingredients from nutrition, health, and safety, to entertainment, convenience, satiety, and status”.

Data from Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) suggested that during the period 1995 to 2009 (figure 2) there has been a positive change in income per capita (World Bank, 2013). With increased income levels, consumers may now have the ability to make purchasing decisions based not only on satisfying basic circumstances such as price and affordability, but also to satisfy a higher cognitive and economic condition. Importantly, consumers may purchase vegetables based on their qualitative and aesthetics characteristics. If this is the case, primary producers and marketers should pay increased attention to qualitative characteristics if they are to meet consumers' demand.

Understanding how these factors influence the purchase decision process in contemporary food markets, in developed countries, this is a must for agribusiness operators. Observed trends in developing countries suggest the need to focus on these

issues also. This study therefore, attempts to look at the impact of six (6) quality and value attributes (price, texture, color, flavor, size, and shape) on consumers' purchasing decisions. Tomato, a very popular vegetable consumed in Trinidad is the focus of this study. In modern marketing, the impact of these factors were so great, they contributed to calling for a "New Economics of Agriculture" (Antle, 1999).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the "*Old Economics of Agriculture*", Antle suggested that a stylized demand-and-supply model of an agricultural market can be represented as:

$$X^d = D(P, I, N) \quad \text{Eq. (1)}$$

$$X^s = S(P, W, K, T, G) \quad \text{Eq. (2)}$$

Where  $X^d$  is a traditional demand function while  $X^s$  is the supply function. Equation (1) assumes that the quantity demanded of a given good is a function of output prices (P), income (I) and population size (N). In the supply function (Eq. 2), it is implied that the quantity supplied of that good is a function of output prices (P), factor prices (W), capital (K), technology (T) and government policy (G). While product price (P) and factor prices (W) were the focus in the "*Old Economics*", today other factors must be considered. This called for the "*New Economics of Agriculture*". In this context, the stylized demand-and-supply models are as follows:

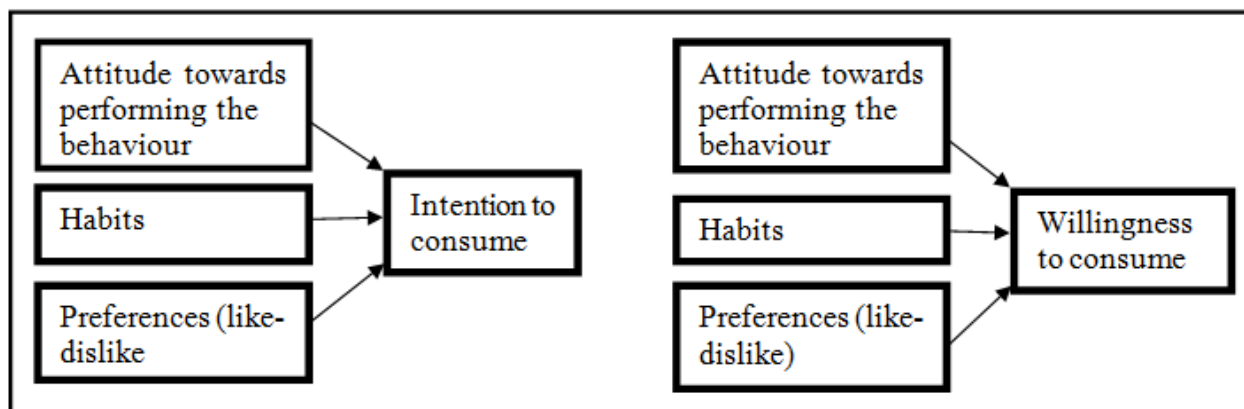
$$X^d = D(P, I, N, C, Q) \quad \text{Eq. (3)}$$

$$X^s = S(P, W, K, T, G, Q) \quad \text{Eq. (4)}$$

The revised functions introduced additional components aimed at explaining the quantity demanded and supplied of a given good. These components are the characteristics of the consumer population (C) and product quality (Q). Some of the consumer characteristics (C) that are necessary to consider are: convenience, variety, all year round availability, increasing awareness of the link between food and health, increasing awareness of animal welfare and environmental issues (Hughes, 1993). The

product quality (Q) attributes range from color, texture, nutritional content issues to genetically modified organisms.

Based on the demand-and-supply model of the New Economics of Agriculture, the inclusion of the characteristics of the consumer population (C) and product quality (Q) is consistent with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The TRA assumes that consumers are rational and that their behavior is planned and incorporates perceived behavioral controls (Petrovici, Ritson & Ness, 2004). In the past thirty years, several studies were conducted in the area of food choices, namely sweet, salty and fatty foods (Tuorila & Pangborn, 1988a), all of which aimed to predict consumption based on a TRA model. The fundamental principle of the TRA is that the intention to act a particular way is dependent on the attitude towards performing the behavior and social norms or social pressure (Petrovici, Ritson & Ness, 2004). Based on this fundamental principle, it can be established that the TRA accounts for non economic factors in food consumption similar to the 'new economics of agriculture' demand-and supply model. A framework for the TRA was proposed by Ajzen & Fishbein (1975) and was later modified Saba and Di Natale (1998) (Figure 1).



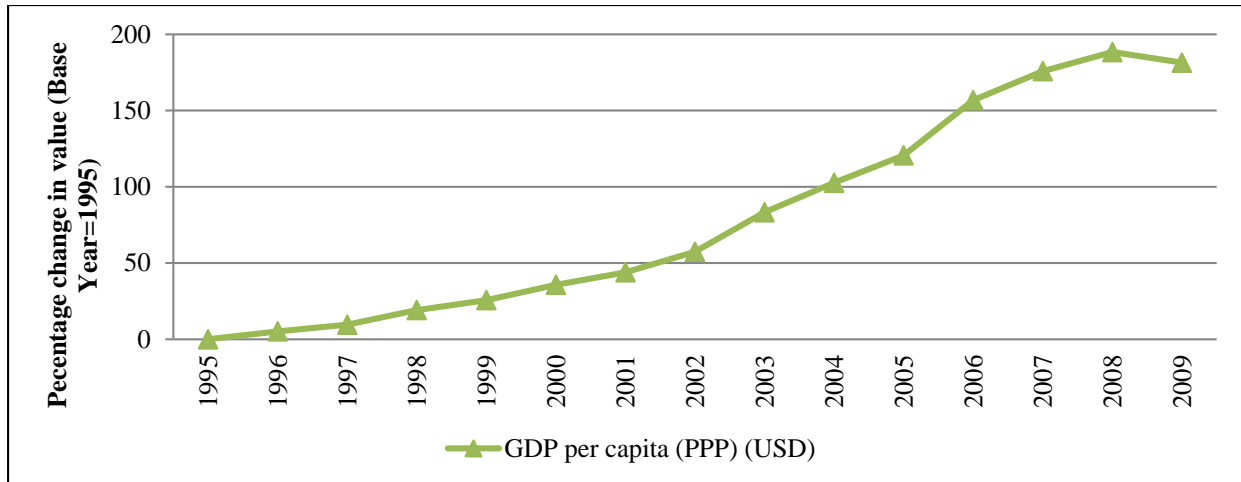
**Figure 1:** Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) Model adapted from Ajzen & Fishbein (1975) by Saba & Di Natale (1998).

The modification of the TRA model indicates that the attitude, habits and preferences of consumers can influence consumers to have two different reasoned actions for consuming a product. Therefore, we can state that a consumer can have an intention or willingness to consume a particular product. Analyzing the literature on the determinants of food choices showed that classifying consumers as either willing to consume or intending to consume is essentially similar to classifying consumers as either value seekers or quality seekers. It can be intuitively deduced that value seekers are consumers with an intention to consume or as we will refer to it, a purchase intention to consume. Similarly, quality seekers are consumers with a willingness to consume. In the context of the TRA, the intention to consume indicates an indifference in consuming a product as it assumes consumption under economic restrictions where as willingness to consume assumes no economic restrictions therefore the non economic considerations of consumption (Petrovici, Ritson & Ness, 2004).

To further understand the classification of consumers, we defined value seekers as the consumers that search for perceived value (primarily from product prices) when purchasing (Monroe & Krishnan, 1985) whereas, quality seekers search for primarily non-price attributes when purchasing a product (Petrovici, Ritson & Ness, 2004). According to Monroe & Krishnan (1985), consumers will purchase a product as long as the perceived gains exceed the price for it therefore having a high perceived value. The value seeking consumers perceive a high value from purchasing a product therefore they will have a positive purchase intention (Li Fang, undated). Issanchou (1996) argued that food quality to a consumer is not an inherent characteristic of the food but rather a concept of acceptability. Based on this argument, it is more acceptable to phrase food quality as perceived quality for food. It is perceived quality that will motivate a consumer to buy a particular product (Marreiros & Ness, 2009) or in other words, willingness to consume is dependent on the perceived quality of the product.

Framing these arguments under the TRA model, we can intuitively assume that the attitudes, habits and preferences of perceived quality seekers will result in greater willingness to consume a commodity, whereas the attitudes, habits and preferences of perceived value seekers will result in stronger intention to consume a commodity. Understanding the types of consumer then, will allow for improved marketing strategies through the identification of niche markets consisting of consumers who are more willing to accept (quality seekers) a diversified product. This can be critical in marketing food commodities in developing countries.

Conceptually, the traditional view of a developing country and food purchasing/consumption patterns is that they are driven by price considerations. As Senauer (2001, p.1) stated "Food consumption patterns in the United States and Europe, as well as other high-income countries, are increasingly being driven by a much more complex set of factors than economists have traditionally analyzed in our demand studies". What is the case in T&T? Are consumers value-seekers or quality-seekers? In the context of this study, a "value-seeker" refers to an individual that prefers several pre-defined value attributes (price, size, shape) to "quality" attributes of a tomato (texture, colour and flavour). A "quality-seeker" therefore, refers to an individual that prefers "quality" (non-price) attributes to "value" (price based) attributes of a tomato. Given the rising per capita income (figure 2) experienced in T&T for the period 1995 to 2009: Have consumers in T&T gotten pass the price threshold level and are now quality-seekers?



**Figure 2:** Annual percentage change in income per capita in Trinidad and Tobago

*Source:* World Bank (2013)

## METHODOLOGY

A survey research methodology was used in this study. Sample data were collected via face to face interviews by pre-trained interviewers (five per area). A total of 373 consumers were surveyed. The procedure for selection of the sample was; (i) identify from a list of national population demographics provided by the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago (CSO) the five most populated geographical areas of Trinidad, and (ii) from each area, randomly select four (4) supermarkets from a listing of all local supermarkets. Subsequently, interviewers visited the survey locations and interacted with patrons of the supermarkets upon their exit. The first customer encountered at the exit was selected and if a successful interview was done, the next third customer to exit the supermarket was then approached. If the individual agreed to participate, an interview was done. If declined, the next person to exit was approached. This procedure was done in all areas to arrive at the sample size of 373 respondents. Data were collected via face to face interviews. Pre-trained interviewers were required to read questions from the survey instrument and record the responses.

This method was done for all respondents so that they did not misinterpret the questions. This facilitated more accurate responses and a higher response rate. Face to face interviews were also used because it was inexpensive to administer and relatively more time effective.

The questionnaire covered two (2) main sections; (i) personal characteristics and (ii) attribute preferences. Respondents were required to indicate their respective income bracket and educational level from pre-defined options. Subsequently, the respondent was presented with six (6) attributes of a typical tomato:

- Price
- Colour
- Texture
- Flavour
- Size
- Shape

The individual was then asked to indicate the degree of importance of each attribute. The degree of importance assigned to each attribute was measured on a 3-point scale; “very important” (3), “somewhat important” (2) and “not important” (1). The respondent was required to indicate only one option for each attribute. The treatment of these variables is further discussed in the following section. Subsequently, the data was cleaned and analyzed with the use of STATA. The Friedman test was used to rank attributes based on their importance to consumers, then a Factor analysis was done to group all attributes into latent variables (“quality-seekers” and “value-seekers”). Finally, a logistic regression was employed to determine the probability that a person is a “quality seeker”, based on chosen personal characteristics.

#### RANKING OF ATTRIBUTES

The Friedman (non-parametric) test was used to determine whether any significant differences existed in the ranking of tomato attributes, that is, if some attributes were noticeably preferred to others. According to (Lowry, 1999), the Friedman test is generally used to compare two or more related samples without making any assumptions regarding the distribution of the dataset. Firstly, the data is ranked by rows (observations) and then the mean rank is compared across columns (variables). A



column (variable) with the highest “mean rank” is ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and similarly, a column (variable) with the lowest “mean rank” is ranked last. These tests allowed attributes to be accurately ranked based on importance.

#### PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ANALYSIS (PCA)

Data on consumers’ preferences for attributes of a fresh tomato were obtained with the use of a rating scale. Respondents were required to indicate on a 3 point scale the level of importance of six (6) basic attributes of a fresh tomato. Factor analysis was then used to identify latent factors which accounted for overall attribute preferences. The factorability of the 6 attributes items was examined.

The extraction method adopted for factor analysis was Principal Components with an orthogonal rotation (Varimax). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy test was used to determine whether the partial correlations among variables are insubstantial. According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000), the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy should be ideally 0.6 or higher (maximum of 1). The Bartlett's test of sphericity was observed to detect whether the correlation matrix was an identity matrix; if  $P < 0.05$ , this implies that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, which satisfies an assumption of factor analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Finally, a Scree test was used to plot the eigen values against the equivalent factor loadings to determine the maximum number of factors to extract. According to Costello & Osborne (2005), the point at which the curve bends (elbow) indicates the maximum number of factors to extract. For a definite solution, one (1) less component than the number at the “elbow” is suitable.

Factor analysis resulted in the extraction of two (2) factors (as shown in the results). Raw factor scores were then computed and utilized to group consumers into their respective factor. Consumers were assigned to factors labeled; “quality-seekers” (1) or “value-seekers” (0). This variable (1 if quality seekers, 0 otherwise) was then regressed on monthly income level, educational level and gender in a logistic regression model.

## LOGISTIC REGRESSION

According to Gujurati (2003), in a logistic regression model, the coefficient ( $\beta$ ) describes the effect of the independent variable on the log-odds ratio, in favour of  $Y=1$ . Further, the sign of  $\beta$  indicates whether the independent variable ( $X$ ) has a positive or negative impact on the probability that  $Y=1$  (that is,  $\Pr(Y=1)$ ). The logit model has a cumulative distribution function (CDF) and its parameters are derived from Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE), which defines the effect of a marginal change in  $X$  on the probability that  $Y=1$ . The logistic model was specified as follows:

$$\Pr QS_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{lowINC}_i + \beta_2 \text{medINC}_i + \beta_3 \text{highINC}_i + \beta_4 \text{intEDU}_i + \beta_5 \text{tertEDU}_i + \beta_6 \text{Female}_i + \mu_i$$

- $\Pr QS_i$  - the probability that person  $i$  is a “Quality Seeker” i.e.  $\Pr QS=1$
- $\text{modINC}_i$  - 1 if person earns less than TT\$3,000 to TT\$6,000 monthly (modest), 0 otherwise
- $\text{medINC}_i$  - 1 if person earns TT\$6,000 to TT\$10,000 monthly, 0 otherwise
- $\text{highINC}_i$  - 1 if person earns more than TT\$10,000 monthly, 0 otherwise
- $\text{intEDU}_i$  - 1 if person completed secondary (intermediate) level education, 0 otherwise
- $\text{highEDU}_i$  - 1 if person completed tertiary level education, 0 otherwise
- $\text{Female}_i$  - 1 if person is a female, 0 otherwise
- $\mu_i$  is the random disturbance term.

The reference category for income was “individuals earning less than TT\$3,000 monthly”. Furthermore, the reference category for education was “those with no or only primary level education”.

## RESULTS

### DESCRIPTIVES

With respect to monthly average income earnings, 23% of respondents earned less than TT\$3,000, 39% earned within the range TT\$3,001 to TT\$6,000, whilst 24% earned TT\$6,001 to TT\$10,000 and 14% earning more than TT\$10,000 monthly. Results showed

that 13% of respondents had no or only primary level education, 34% had secondary level education and 53% completed tertiary level education. The majority of respondents (61%) were females, while 39% were males.

Results of the Friedman test indicated (Table 1) that “Price” was the highest rated attribute of a tomato. Most respondents (82%) stated that “Price” played a very important role in their purchasing decisions. Conversely, individuals indicated that “Shape” was the least important attribute, with 74% stating that it had some importance.

**Table 1:** Frequencies and Rank Order of Consumers’ Preferences for Attributes

Rank Ordering	Mean Ranks (F <sub>i</sub> )	Attributes	Not Important (%)	Somewhat Important (%)	Very Important (%)
1	4.19	Price	4	14	82
2	3.88	Texture	6	24	70
3	3.84	Colour	2	31	67
4	3.79	Flavour	4	30	66
5	2.86	Size	12	49	39
6	2.39	Shape	26	46	28

*Friedman test chi-square value = 497.01\*\*\* (df=5)*

#### PCA: FACTOR EXTRACTION

Table 2 presents the results of the PCA of attributes. Firstly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .78, above the commonly recommended value of .6, and secondly, Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2(28) = 545.5, p < .01$ ). Hence, the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix was rejected. The scree plot indicated that two (2) factors should be extracted. The first two factors explained 56.4% of the variance (factor 1 and 2 independently contributed 29.7% and 26.7% of the variance respectively). The identified factors were then labeled as follows;

(i) Value-seekers ( $F_1$ ) and (ii) Quality-seekers ( $F_2$ ). Self-computed raw scores (non-refined method) were derived for both factors based on the subscales of each factor. With regards to factor “quality-seekers” ( $QS_{rs}$ ), higher scores (of a normalized range: 1-10) indicated that consumers had more preference for quality attributes. With respect to factor “value-seekers” ( $VS_{rs}$ ), higher scores (of a normalized range: 1-10) indicated that consumers had more preference for value based attributes. The following condition was then derived:

If  $[VS_{rs} - QS_{rs}] < 0$ , then consumers are regarded as “quality-seekers” (1)

If  $[VS_{rs} - QS_{rs}] \geq 0$ , then consumers are regarded as “value-seekers” (0)

Overall, 68% of the sample was “quality-seekers” while 32% were “value-seekers”.

**Table 2:** Factor loadings (F) based on a Principal Components Analysis with Varimax rotation for “Attribute” items

Attributes	F <sub>1</sub>	F <sub>2</sub>
<b>Value Seekers (F<sub>1</sub>)</b>		
<i>Price</i>	.625	.136
<i>Shape</i>	.693	.272
<i>Size</i>	.719	.121
<b>Quality Seekers (F<sub>2</sub>)</b>		
<i>Texture</i>	.111	.736
<i>Colour</i>	.198	.751
<i>Flavour</i>	.022	.671
<b>Summary Statistics</b>		
Initial Eigen values	2.19	1.88
Cumulative Variance (%)	29.7	56.4
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	0.76	
Bartlett’s test of Sphericity	295.48***	

## PROBABILITIES OF THE LOGISTIC REGRESSION

Table 3 presents the summary statistics of the logistic regression model of consumers' attributes preference for fresh tomatoes. The dependent variable of this regression was the "probability that a person is a quality seeker" i.e. 1 if "quality seeker", 0 if "value seeker" (PrQS). The independent variables were monthly income level, educational level and gender. Income level was expressed dummy variables with the following structure; (i) high income- "1" if person earns more than TT\$10,000 monthly, "0" other; (ii) medium income- "1" if person earns TT\$6,000 to TT\$10,000 monthly, "0" other; and (iii) modest income- "1" if person earns TT\$3,000 to TT\$6,000 monthly (reference category being low income: <TT\$3,000). Educational level was also stated as dummy variables as follows; (i) intermediate level education- "1" if person completed secondary level education, "0" otherwise; and (ii) high educational level- "1" if person completed tertiary level education, "0" otherwise (reference category being those with no/primary level education) . Lastly, gender was expressed as "1" if female, "0" if male.

Initially, all observations with a Z-score of more than 3 were considered outliers and omitted from the model. The model proved to be a good fit, with an overall accuracy rate of 72.9%, and a chi-squared value of 65.4 (df = 6), significant at  $p < 0.01$  level. The Hosmer-Lemeshow (H/L) chi-squared value was 6.4 with a p-value of 0.59 ( $g = 10$ ) indicating that the model fitted the data well. The Receiver operating characteristics curve (ROC) analysis indicated that the area under the curve was .731 with 95% confidence interval (.679, .782). The P-value was .000, confirming that the area under the curve was significantly different from the concordance index of 0.5 (suggests good discriminating power). This implies that the predictions of the logistic regression model were more likely to be accurate.

Individual tests of significance (Wald statistic  $\sim \chi^2_{df}$ ) revealed that monthly income level, education level and gender were a significant predictors of the probability that a person is a quality seeker. With respect to monthly income level, it was probable that

individuals with a monthly salary of more than TT\$10,000 were approximately 49 times more likely to be “quality-seekers” than those who earned less than TT\$3,000 ( $\chi^2 (1, N=373) =14.3, p=0.00$ ). Also, it was probably that respondents who earned TT\$6,001 - TT\$10,000 monthly were approximately 3 times more likely to be “quality-seekers” than persons earning less than TT\$3,000 monthly ( $\chi^2 (1, N=373) =14.3, p=0.00$ ). Finally, results predicted that individuals who earned TT\$3,000 - TT\$6,000 were 98% more likely to be “quality seekers” than those earning less than TT\$3,000 monthly ( $\chi^2 (1, N=373) =6.0, p=0.02$ ). With regards to educational level, results indicated that persons with tertiary level education were approximately 2.3 times more likely to be quality seekers than those with no or only primary level education ( $\chi^2 (1, N=373) =9.78, p=0.00$ ). Also, it was probable that individuals with secondary level education were 1.3 times more likely to be quality seekers than those with no or only primary level education ( $\chi^2 (1, N=373) =4.53, p=0.03$ ). Finally, results of the logistic regression showed that females were approximately 1.1 times more likely to be quality seekers than males ( $\chi^2 (1, N=373) =8.08, p=0.00$ ).

Based on the findings it appears that as a person’s educational level and monthly income increased, the probability of them being a quality-seeker also increased. Furthermore, females were more likely to be quality seekers.

**Table 3:** Results of the logit model on the probability that a person is a quality seeker

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Exp (B) - 1
Constant	0.23	0.21	0.01	1	0.00***	1.02	
<i>Income</i>							
highINC (>TT\$10,000)	3.91	1.00	14.34	1	0.00***	49.42	48.42
medINC (TT\$6,001-TT\$10,000)	1.22	0.33	13.37	1	0.00***	3.37	2.37
modIncome (TT\$3,001-TT\$6,000)	0.68	0.28	6.01	1	0.02**	1.98	0.98
<i>Education</i>							
highEDU	1.19	0.38	9.78	1	0.00***	3.30	2.30
intEDU	0.83	0.39	4.53	1	0.03**	2.31	1.31
<i>Gender</i>							
Female	0.75	0.26	8.08	1	.00***	2.11	1.11
	<b>Overall %</b>	<b>Chi Square</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>-2 Log likelihood</b>	<b>H/L Chi Square</b>		
Step 1	72.9	65.4***	6	390.52	6.4 (df=8)		

Results of the logistic regression (Table 3) indicated that certain individuals are more likely to be quality seekers than others. In any instance, a “quality-seeker” place less emphasis on price, shape and size and therefore, focuses more on texture, colour and flavour. However, results of table 1 indicated that most respondents (82%) regarded “Price” as a very important attribute considered when purchasing tomatoes. One question remains unanswered; *how can a consumer place great importance on price and yet be considered a quality-seeker?* To understand this, cross-tabulations of independent variables and the “Price” attribute of a tomato were undertaken and chi squared values were reported (Table 4). “Price” was categorized into two discrete cells, “Not so important” and “Very important”. Although most consumers placed great importance on “Price”, results of table 4 shows a distinction between “price” and “income”. The logistic regression indicated that as income increased, the probability of them being a quality-seeker also increased; likewise, chi square correlations showed that as individuals’ income increased, the importance placed on price decreased.

**Table 4:** Cross tabulation of Independent variables and “Price”

Variable	Categories	Price		$\chi^2$
		<i>Not So Important</i>	<i>Very Important</i>	
Gender	Male	16	84	0.60
	Female	18	82	
Education	None	10	90	0.89
	Primary	15	85	
	Secondary	17	83	
	Tertiary	19	81	
Income	TT\$<3,000	11	89	0.00***
	TT\$3,001 – 6,000	14	86	
	TT\$6,001 – 10,000	17	83	
	> TT\$10,000	36	64	

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Widely acknowledged are the increased efforts by agrifood marketers in developed and developing countries to differentiate their products on non-price attributes. As the results of this study indicate tomato purchasers/consumers in T&T are still driven by price. This study shows that consumers of tomato in Trinidad still search for purchase value in consumption and therefore will display a reasoned action of purchase intention. However, as educational and income levels increase the importance of price in the purchase/consumption decisions decrease. This suggests that if education and income levels are increasing in the population, then consumers in T&T will display a reasoned action to be more willing to consume regardless of the price of tomatoes. It can be further assumed that various facets of the society are placing increased emphasis on non-price attributes in their purchase/consumption decisions of tomato, and possibly other vegetables. Essentially, agrifood markets in T&T are shifting from price-based



markets to customer oriented markets. This has implications for the attributes of foods such as tomatoes being sold at major food outlets. The producers are expected to deliver a particular quality of product when selling to major food outlets such as supermarkets, restaurants and other high end markets. These major food outlets usually have a high revenue turnover; therefore, they require producers that can meet their particular supply needs especially in terms of quality and consistency. More consumers in T&T are willing to purchase tomatoes and other vegetables at higher prices in these food outlets as long as it meets a quality level that they deem sufficient. This has implications to the marketing of tomatoes and other vegetables by local farmers. The local farming sector has to consider more customer oriented marketing if it wants to continue to be competitive and access the high revenue food outlets.

Farmers are being constantly challenged by the easy movement of food globally. This means that farmers have to compete with imported food from several countries. Food importation in T&T is consistently rising and this poses a threat to local agriculture. It was estimated by the Ministry of Food Production for Trinidad and Tobago that the country imports between US\$600 to US\$700 in food annually. A close examination of the imported products reveals that they provide the consumers with attributes they desire, such as, convenience, size and color. In addition to possessing the desired attributes, imported products consistently maintain a quality and quantity that satisfies the demand from the major food outlets. It can be observed that imported products are competing with domestic products with both price and non price attributes. This suggests that the imported products can appeal to both value seekers and quality seekers and they are readily accessible given the demand for it by the major food outlets. Farmers should seek to understand attributes that are demanded by consumers and make every effort to provide them in a cost effective manner.

Based on this study, a "cheap tomato" is not the only tomato desired by the consumer. Consumers with rising incomes and higher education are looking for

tomatoes of higher quality, while holding prices constant. This has implications for local farmers producing other fruits and vegetables. Identifying the attributes sought by consumers and finding innovative ways to provide them affordably must be the focus of ag-entrepreneurs and other facilitators in T&T, if agriculture is to make the contribution to the economy expected of it. With respect to the primary question proposed by this study, (*Are consumers in Trinidad and Tobago value seekers or quality seekers?*), the evidence supports the latter; consumers are progressing towards being quality seekers.

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