CONDOR: CONsumer Decision making on ORganic products


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Objectives
Although the market for organically produced foods features broad opportunities for EU-wide expansion, until now it remains relatively small. To increase it efficiently, an elementary understanding of all the processes comprised in consumer decision-making in terms of the choice between organic and non-organic foods is required, considering consumers’ attitudes towards fresh produces and processed foods with organically produced components. Accordingly the main objectives of the EU-project CONDOR, in which eight EU member states are united, which represent a geographic spread across Europe with greatly varying market penetration of organic foods, are:

- to provide a basic understanding of the processes involved in consumer decision-making on the purchase and consumption of processed and fresh organic foods;
- to model consumer choice of organic foods based on attitudes, values, affective and moral concerns over eight EU member states.

Methods

The project is divided into five interrelated and interdependent workpackages (WPs). A comparison of four elicitation methods took place in the UK, Finland and Italy (WP1) to find out the method that takes best into account the less rational influences on behaviour and elicits beliefs about fresh and processed foods. After the completion of WP1, the traditional method was chosen as the
basic method of WP2, complemented by an open-end emotion section, to detect the key affective and moral issues regarding the consumption of organic food by using structural interviews (n = 200 in the UK, Finland, Italy). The qualitative technique of ladderizing was used in WP3 to trace cross-national and country specific attributes-to-value chains by eliciting cognitive structures, food-related lifestyles (FRL) and different levels of experience with organic products (n = 100 face-to-face interviews in the UK, Denmark, Germany and Spain). Many works on FRL have already identified typical consumer segments across European countries. Currently those values that best discriminates between segments are identified and serve as an input for WP4, where qualitative (n = 50) and quantitative (n = 1000) interviews will be accomplished in each participating country, with the aim to arrive at a model of consumer decision-making in relation to organic foods. WP5 runs throughout the project and deals with the dissemination and publication of results.

**First Results (WP3/Germany)**

Consumers’ demands on the quality of foods refer to four main dimensions: hedonism, health, process, and convenience. In the minds of many consumers, processed organic foods as well as the combination of organic produce and convenience cause a mental conflict with possible negative impact on the product acceptance – e.g. to be seen in the fact that the proportion of frozen and convenience foods in the total demand of all organic products in Germany only amounts to 3% (see chart below). WP3 attends to this conflict by eliciting consumers’ cognitive structures with regard to (organic) foods of different degrees of convenience, based on varying stages of processing (using pizza as a stimuli). The first review of the German data confirms the assumption of a mental contradiction, too, which is closely related to the discrepancy between consumers’ evaluation of organic foods to be fresh, pure, and healthy, whereas convenience food is rated as processed, not fresh, less healthy or even unhealthy. Parallel to a general mistrust in the products’ claim of being organic – though the foods are tagged with the official national “Bio”-seal – the degree of mistrust increases in case of organic convenience products, varying in accordance to the degree of convenience. The analysis also verifies the results of previous studies, that individual values – most of all happiness/pleasure, healthiness/longer life, security, independence/flexibility, inner balance/inner harmony and hedonism – are more crucial for buying foods, than social values such as responsibility for future generations, for nature and the environment, which is also true for organic foods.

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