

## CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF ROMANIAN ECOLOGICAL PRODUCTS

Gabriela BOLDUREANU<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Petre Andrei” University, Iasi  
e-mail:gabrivaleanu@yahoo.com

*In the past years, among consumers, is establishing a growing interest in agricultural products and food quality, namely, ecological products. Even if organic foods are 20-40 % more expensive than conventional ones, their consumption is increasing and the Romanian market is growing fast. The market share of ecological products in our country is projected to reach about 2% over the next five years; Romania is currently experiencing higher trends of development in this sector than the rest of European countries. Currently, ecological products occupy a less than 1% of market share, many of the Romanians consumers preferring conventional products currently instead of ecological products. Starting from these considerations, we conducted a market study in the town Iasi, based on questionnaire on consumer behavior of ecological food products in Romania, whose results will be presented in this article.*

**Key words:** ecological products, consumer behavior, market study.

In condition of internationalization in the market, consumers is oriented their attention to organic products because it differs from other products through quality. Organic food products are diversified, healthy, free from diseases and pests, free of harmful residues, with a balanced of bioactive substances and minerals [4].

They are derived from technologies that do not use chemical fertilizers or pesticides. In preparing organic food, additives and other chemical substances incorporated are waived, which means that disposal of these products is usually in special stores or directly from the manufacturer.

But what is the difference between organic food, natural and conventional ones? Natural foods have natural fertilizer. The Romanians population are influenced by the word "natural" on the products label which means only conventional food, in their processing that have not used food additives or alimentary preservatives.

The organic products are healthier for the human body, followed by natural products, then the conventional products. To cultivate vegetable and fruit conventional is used chemical fertilizers are, while for the ecological product should be created an environment as less polluted. That explains the higher price of their products, because the productions process it is more expensive [2].

Even if organic foods are with 20-40 % more expensive than conventional, consumption is growing on the Romanian market, which makes the consumer behavior of such products [1]. The market share of organic products on the

Romanian market will reach about 2 % in the next five years, now Romania is currently experiencing higher trends of development in this sector than the rest of the other European countries.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

During period 09-14 March 2009 was conducted an investigation based on a questionnaire [7] in a supermarket in Iasi, about consumer behavior of organic products. Thus were interviewed a number of 64 persons.

The application of the questionnaire was made inside the supermarket, making a directed selection because those persons chosen in the sample were visitors and buyers shop.

The survey was direct (oral), by the technical "face to face", so direct communication between the controller and the person interviewed. The effective filling of the questionnaire was carried out either by the operator or the respondent in the presence of the operator, depending on the respondent preference.

Questionnaire analysis was performed using the statistical program SPSS 10.0.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Thus, at the question *"What do you believe means that a product is organic?"* we noticed three categories of responses:

- over 60% of consumers associate a organic product with a "product that does not harm in any way the environment" and a "product that contains no chemicals, E and artificial additives";
- between 40 and 60 % of consumers associate a organic product with a "product whose consumption / use does not harm the health of the consumer and a natural product";
- between 10 and 40 % of consumers associate a organic products with a "product that decompose easily in nature after use" and a "product labeled and certified".

The consumer perception [3] about the organic product is rather of a natural product that does not harm the environment and does not contain chemicals, artificial additives, the certification and labeling part of organic products doesn't had a significant share. There is also, a confusion existing among consumers, they doesn't make the difference between organic, natural and conventional products.

When was asked *"How often did you buy organic products?"* it was found that for 34.9% of respondents, frequency of purchasing of organic products is approximately a normal curve with a maximum frequency of purchase "once a week", while very high frequencies "daily" (14.0%) or very low "rarely or not at all" (11.6%) are minimal.

At the question *"What organic products did you purchase so far?"* most consumers are buying organic vegetables and fruits (79.1%), followed by milk (37.2%) and cereals (32.6%).

Regarding the question *"What element of a label of a organic product is considered most important in consumers believe in the quality and safety of the*

*consumer?"*, 48.8% of consumers said that the most important element of a label organic product is considered to be "the contain and the ingredients of a product", while the brand, the logo and the product name have a much smaller percentage (between 2 and 20%).

We believe that these responses means a low buyer confidence in the brand inspection, specific logo for organic products, the production method, basically the item that matters most on a label is the contain and the ingredients used on the product.

Regarding the question "*Do you know any store that sells only organic products?"* most respondents (58.1 %) did not know which shops are selling only organic products. Also, respondents who said they were aware of shops that sell organic products (37.2 %), when they were to nominate the known store, only a small percentage (7.0 %) were able to individualize store respectively with the correct name. This leads us to the idea that the stores specializing exclusively on organic products are not very well known among consumers, and their reputation remains very small.

At the question "*What is the main reason for not buying / not buying organic products more often?"* 37.2 % of respondents indicated poor offer existing in stores and 32.6 % of consumers said higher prices of organic products. These two elements are the main reasons identified by respondents to justify the rare purchase of organic product.

Regarding the question "*How much are you willing to pay more for an organic product from other non-organic?"* the responses have a great diversity, the average percent is 27.38 % with a high dispersion of 1065.37. Important is that in an overwhelming proportion (93%), respondents are aware and are willing to pay more for organic products, depending on the exact percentage of the purchasing power of each other.

Also, consumers have also been questioned in connection with the environmental impact about organic products consumption. Thus, a majority percentage (93. 0%) is aware of the positive influence that organic products have on the environment.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis made, it is detached the idea that the price too high for organic products and a very low production level in Romania makes the consumer of organic products to be but very few. As regards consumption of bio products on the internal market, it is less than 1 % currently, according to the information from Ministry of Agriculture.

Price of the products/services remains a very important criterion in consumer choice: comparing the price of a product / service with other labeled organic in the same category influencing a lot the decision of buying. The fact that an organic product / service must be more expensive than others in the same category of products / services is a major obstacle to change the consumer behavior.

Also, another important element which is detached from the analysis is the consumer's information about the importance of ecological criteria that should be taken when purchasing goods and services using. Many consumers do not seek products labeled organic in the district stores. The dissemination of information in stores, billboards with the European eco-label, layout of the organic products in district are marketing elements that can facilitate the purchasing of products labeled organic.

Finally, we believe that promoting and advertising the European eco-label among consumers, by developing a strategy of "environmental education" and by others marketing and advertising tools can change the consumer behavior of organic products.

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