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Motives Affecting Consumer Attitudes and Consumption of Organic Foods in Bulgaria

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper[1] is to reveal and analyse the main motives affecting the attitudes and purchasing models of organic foods in Bulgaria. The explanation of these motives is essential with regard to the adequate influencing of consumer behaviour with the purpose of maintaining the dynamics of the organic food market and its sustainable development in the future.

Answers to the following research questions are sought consecutively: (1) What are the attitudes of Bulgarian consumers towards organic foods? (2) What are the main motives affecting the nonbuying of organic foods and restricting their consumption? (3) What are the main motives affecting the purchase of organic foods and stimulating their consumption?

Key Words: Organic Foods; Attitudes and Consumption of Organic Foods; Bulgaria

JEL: M31

Introduction

In the last two decades, the demand for natural and organic foods on a global scale has been characterised by high dynamics. Based on an analysis of statistical data[2] the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The global market of organic foods has been growing and consumer demand increased to more than €92 billion in 2017, and the average annual growth rate in the developed countries is relatively the highest in the food industry;
- Regardless of the high growth rate, its relative size (compared to the market of conventional foods) remains insignificant – organic foods still represent only a small fraction of food market and they still are perceived as "luxury products". Globally European countries account for the highest shares of organic food value sales as a percentage of their respective food markets. Denmark, for example, has the higest organic market share globally (13.4%) and was the first county to cross the 10% mark.

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[1] This article is a part of a research project "Green consumption: attitudes, intentions and real behavior" that covers several other subject areas: a green home consumption; a green car use; waste separation; participation in green activities.

[2] Organic in Europe: Prospects and Developments (2016). IFOAM EU, FiBL, Marche Polytechnic University and Naturland. Available at: www.ifoam-eu.org

- Although sales of organic foods are growing at a heathy rate, there are still persisting challenges, such as rising number of standards (there are over 80 national standards and a great number of private/voluntary standards for organic agriculture), demand concentration (about 90% of sales are in North America and Europe), supply shortfalls (organic food supply appears to be lagging behind demand), trade agreements (the global organic food industry is being affected by trade wars and geopolitics), and competing eco-labels, to name a few[3].

The European organic food market takes second place after the USA market (about €40 billion in 2017). According to the FiBL report[4], the European market recorded growth of 10.9% in 2017, the third double-digit increase since the financial crisis. Within Europe, the EU is the second largest domestic market for organic products following the United States. In 2017, European market amounted to €37.3 billion, of which €34.3 billion pertained to the countries from the European Union (EU28). The Bulgarian market has been developing consistently since 2006-2007, which coincides with the admission of the country to the EU. In 2017 retail sales of organic foods in Bulgaria amount to BGN 58 million (€29 million).

The consumption of organic foods per capita in European countries doubled in the period 2005-2014 and in 2017 reached €47. In the EU28 countries it amounted to €67 in 2017. In Bulgaria, the average consumption per capita is €4, which is far below the average for European countries (for example, €288 in Switzerland, €278 in Denmark, €237 in Sweden), but surpasses consumption in EU13. Consumer spending, although growing, remains low as a proportion of total spending on food in Bulgaria. By expert assessment, in the period 2010-2018 the average consumption in the country increased more than seven times[5]. In 2017 there were 6 471 organic producers, 181 processors, 29 importers and 6 exporters in Bulgaria. Organic share of total agricultural land is about 2.9%.

Previous empirical studies

In recent years researchers and practitioners have shown more and more interest in the supply and demand of organic foods in Bulgaria and the factors that move them.

There are few empirical studies of Bulgarian organic food market. They, however, have been focused more on organic production and supply (manufacturers and traders) than on organic demand and consumer behavior. Moreover, the focus of these studies was mainly placed on some behavioral and demographical characteristics of organic food consumers (quantity and frequency of purchases, types of organic food purchased, sources of information and level of awareness, preferred distribution channels, etc.), but not on the cognitive and emotional aspects, such as motivation, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, etc.

According to a nationwide research named “Production, distribution and consumption of organic products in Bulgaria”, carried out in 2009 by Vitosha Research agency[6]: (1) The majority of Bulgarians do not know what organic foods really are - there is profound lack

[3] FiBL & IFOAM. Organic International: The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerging Trends 2019. Fricc and Bonn. 2019. Available at: https://www.organic-world.net/yearbook/yearbook-2019.html

[4] FiBL & IFOAM. Organic International: The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerging Trends 2019. Fricc and Bonn. 2019.. Available at: https://www.organic-world.net/yearbook/yearbook-2019.html

[5] www.investor.bg

[6] Vitosha Research. Proizvodstvo, razprostranenie I potreblenie na biologichni produkti v Bulgaria. 2009. Available at: ttp://www.mzh.government.bg/MZH/Libraries/Биологично_земеделие/REPORT_BIOPRODUCTS_last.sflb.ashx

of information about the characteristics that distinguish organic foods from conventional foods and in most cases they are perceived as a synonym of natural /ecological products. About ¼ of the Bulgarians does not suspect of the existence of organic products at all; (2) The main reason for purchasing organic foods is their healthiness (more than ¾ of the respondents state this reason) followed by their better taste, higher nutrition, better durability, guarantee of their quality, environmental protection (3.5%) and animal treatment (7.5%); (3) The main obstacles to the purchase of organic foods can be ranked as follows: lack of access to organic products, their high price, distrust of authenticity, self-production of ecological products (20%); (4) There is an insufficient level of category awareness which is a major factor to the shrinking of the consumption on the market; (5) There is an insufficient level of promotion of organic foods - their advertising is insignificant and the topic is almost absent in the media; (6) There aren't enough distinctive signs to recognize organic products - consumers are looking for an universal logo, although, such marking is not mandatory; (7) There are no well-established brands on the market - the well-established brands enjoy increased consumer confidence and are a premise for attracting new / more consumers (the majority of local organic products are offered by small manufacturers who don't have sufficient financial resources for branding); (8) For the majority of people the origin of the product is important – their preferences are towards Bulgarian organic foods which are perceived as products with higher quality and with lower prices.

In its study of the organic product market (2006) the Dicon Group consulting agency[7] found that: (1) Consumer preferences for different types of organic foods can be grouped as follows: milk and dairy products, vegetables, meat and meat products, fruit, juices and beverages, bread, baby food, honey, herbs and spices; (2) The initial source of information about organic products are friends or colleagues. "Mouth-to-mouth" information is the most common source of obtaining information in the category; (3) Consumer awareness is insufficient. Further information is needed about the origin, the ingredients, their advantages and benefits; (4) Organic products have been defined by respondents in different ways: products produced under strict control, products complying with certain standards, products that are non-polluting, health-enhancing and other similar definitions; (5) There is an interdependence between the frequency of purchases and the level of income - the bulk of purchases are made by high-income consumers; (6) The two main distribution channels are specialized stores for healthy and organic foods as well as hypermarket chains. Another preferred channel is direct delivery (online stores); (7) The supply of organic products on the domestic market is insufficient. Their variety is still way too limited. Many respondents say that they want to buy other types of products if they are available and have the expected high quality; (8) The majority of respondents are satisfied with the quality of the products offered for the price they paid; (9) The high retail price of organic products is one of the main obstacles to the market expansion of organic farming. About 62% of respondents are willing to pay up to 30% more than they do for similar conventional products. But with an increase in the price the proportion of consumers willing to purchase the relevant products sharply decreases. At a price of 30 to 50% higher than the conventional ones people that are willing to pay it are only 11.7%.

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[7] Dicon Group. 2006. Prouchvane na pazara na bio produkti. Available at: http://www.org-bg.net/media/docs/BIO_Research.pdf

Another study conducted in 2007 by the Institute of Sociology[8] reveals that: (1) Organic foods still do not take a significant place in the consumer "basket" of Bulgarians; (2) Less than half of the respondents are interested in the origin of the food products when it comes time to buy such; (3) One of the reasons for refusal of a purchase is the insufficient confidence in the manufacturers; the low supply and the moderately high price.

Methodology

Two methods of data collection were used in the research: structured personal interview and structured personal online survey with the same questionnaire. In order to develop the questionnaire 15 in-depth interviews were conducted in advance aiming at structuring the research problem, generating working hypotheses and identifying the main variables. A quota sampling was used with quota characteristics of sex and age. The size of the sampling in the online survey was 800 people, and in the personal interview – 1,600 people. Nationwide survey was conducted between October – November 2016. SPSS was applied in data processing.

In formulation of the research questions the following considerations were taken into account:

(1) The research concerned organic foods – foods which were certified by authorised institutions (with the respective marking) and were sold in the store network (supermarkets, specialised stores, online stores), i.e. excluding those natural products which were homemade and/or sold at the farmers' markets without the necessary certificate and marking;

(1) In the compilation of the list of specific groups of organic foods, only those were considered which registered relatively significant sales;

(1) The complexity of the research field was considered. As is known, the purchase and consumption of foods, including organic foods, is determined by factors that vary in character and degree of influence: social (culture and subculture, family, influencers, lifestyle, eating habits, etc.); economic households (income and expenses, disposable personal income; relative prices of products; availability and supply, etc.); physical (nutritional and taste properties of the products, availability, usage skills, etc.); personal (perception and attitude, beliefs, awareness and knowledge of foods, education, etc.); psychological (mood, stress, personal self-assessment, etc.).

Market penetration: The organic foods market in Bulgaria is in the initial phase of development and structuring

The first group of questions included in the study aims at explaining to what extent organic foods are popular in Bulgarian households, i.e. what is the degree of their market penetration. The data collected shows that the degree of absolute market penetration is relatively high – 71.8% of respondents stated that organic foods were bought in their households (regardless of time, quantities and frequency). It must be noted that the determination of these metrics includes the experienced (test) knowledge of the category, i.e. not only regular purchases and consumption are considered, but also sporadic purchases and/or just product testing (out of curiosity or under the influence of other factors). The average number of categories of organic foods bought (regardless of time) is 2.43; for the previous year – 1.86; for the previous two months – 1.43.

[8] http://www.org-bg.net/media/docs/BIO_Research.pdf

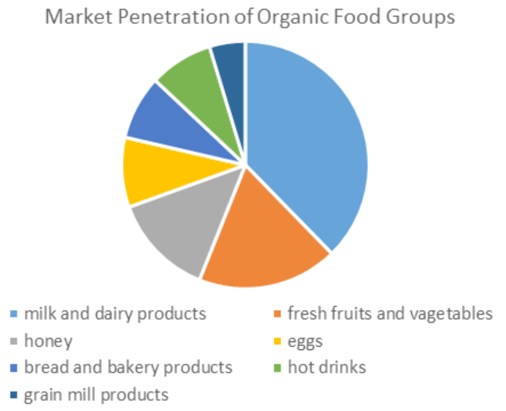

Figure 2. *Market penetration of organic food groups*

Figure 2. provides a breakdown of organic food groups in Bulgaria in terms of their share of the total consumption. Specifics in the preferences of Bulgarian consumers towards the different groups of organic products are observed. The purchases of milk and dairy products predominate, followed by fresh fruit and vegetables, honey, eggs, bread and dough products, warm beverages and grain mill products. In Europe the consumption of fruit and vegetables is the greatest (over 20%), followed by milk and dairy products (around 20%), beverages, including wine (around 10%), warm beverages (3-5%), grain mill products and bread and bakery products. The obvious differences in the preferences towards particular groups of organic foods to a great extent are determined by national cultural characteristics, and also – by the traditional cuisine and eating habits of Bulgarian households. The consumption of the specified groups of foods is most frequently related to the maintenance of a healthy diet or to the care for the children in the family. Also, we cannot ignore the fact that Bulgarians traditionally rely on their own production of agricultural products.

The data collected enables the definition of the profile of people buying organic foods. They predominantly belong to the age group of 40-49 years old, immediately followed by the group of 18-29 and 30-39 years old, i.e. these are people in working age and most probably – with steady monthly income. The buyers are predominantly women living in the capital or in a regional/big city. Usually, they are educated (with higher or college education), married and assess the financial status of their household as very good or good.

For regular buyers of organic foods, consumption is part of their lifestyle. It is the "result of an ideology connected to a specific value system and (their consumption) is reflected in their personal self-assessment, relationships and consumer behaviour"[9]. Studying the psychological aspects of the behaviour of regular consumers of organic foods, a number of authors consider that they are motivated by altruism (connection to others), eco-friendliness (harmony with the world and the sustainable future), universalism (striving for protection of the well-being of humans and nature), benevolence (increase of the well-being of people we are connected to), spirituality (internal harmony and unity with nature), purposefulness (independent thinking and action)[10], etc.

Further to the statements above, consumption of organic foods is often

[9] Schifferstein, H., O. Oude. 1998. Healthrelated determinants of organic food consumption in the Netherlands. // Food Quality and preference, 9, (3), 119 – 133.

[10] Grunert, S., Juhl, H. 1995. Values, environmental attitudes, and buying of organic foods. Journal of Economic Psychology. 16, (1): 39–62; Makatouni, A. 2002. What motivates consumers to buy organic food in the UK? Results from a qualitative study. British Food Journal, 104 (3/4/5): 345–352; Zanoli R, Naspetti S. 2002. Consumer Motivations in the Purchase of Organic Food. British Food Journal 104 (8): 643–653; Fotopoulos C, Krystallis A, Ness M. 2003. Wine produced by organic grapes in Greece: using means-end chains analysis to reveal organic buyers' purchasing motives in comparison to the non-buyers. Food Quality and Preference 14 (7): 549–566.

connected to an alternative lifestyle, including concern and actions to protect the environment, vegetarianism, alternative medicine, etc. In general, the process of deciding to buy and consume organic foods is formed as a result of the complex interaction of the above-mentioned social, economic, personal, physical and psychological factors. This process is also significantly influenced by the purposeful marketing actions of producers and traders of organic foods, as well as by the government policy regarding the sector.

The attitudes of Bulgarian households towards organic foods are neutral with a slight preponderance of positive ones

A Likert scale, composed of six items and scored on a 6-point format was applied to reveal consumer attitudes towards organic food. Opinions regarding: (1) taste properties of organic foods; (2) prices of organic foods; (3) trust in the label and marking; (4) price affordability and ability to buy organic foods; (5) health benefits as a result of organic food consumption; (6) control over the production of organic foods in Bulgaria, were analyzed.

(1) «Organic foods are tastier than conventional foods» – It is obvious that a considerable part of respondents believed that organic foods were distinguished for their high taste properties (43.2%). The significant portion of people who did not find any difference between organic and conventional foods (27.4%) and those who did not have an opinion on the matter (17.2%) is impressive. 12.2% of respondents did not agree or completely disagreed that the taste properties of organic foods were better. It must be pointed out that this was the highest percentage of expressed disagreement regarding the six statements.

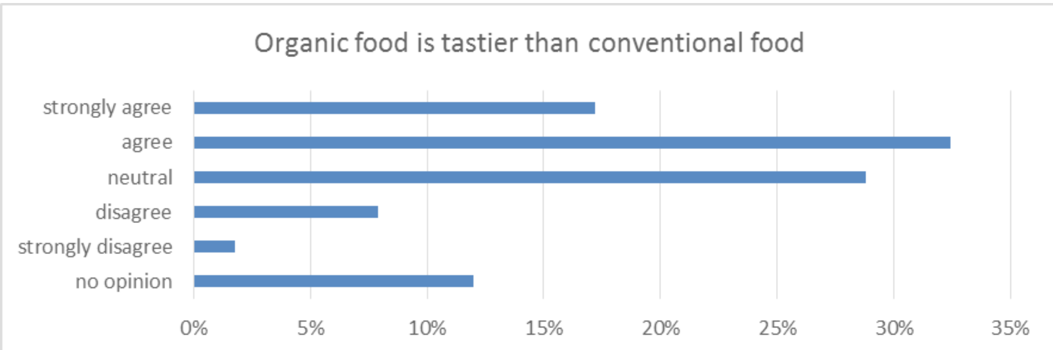

Figure 3. *Attitudes towards organic food taste*

The analysis of the demographic variables showed that men were more favourable to the qualities of organic foods. No serious differences were observed in the perception of taste properties of foods depending on age, education and financial status of households. Residents of the capital were relatively more sceptical about the taste properties of organic foods.

(2) «The prices of organic foods are unreasonably high» – As regards the opinion about the prices of organic foods, a serious «unanimity» of consumers was observed – 67.8% of them considered the prices unreasonably high. Only 6.7% had the opposite opinion.

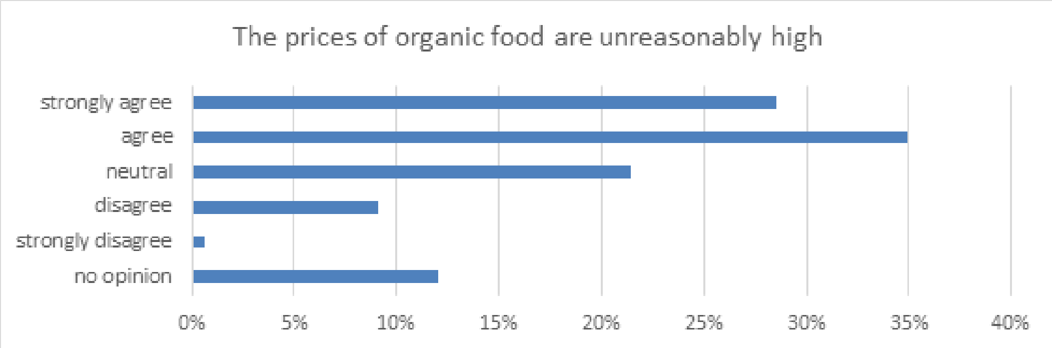

Figure 4. Attitudes towards organic food prices

In terms of price levels, no significant differences were established in the opinions depending on education and place of residence. The highest degree of consent with such an opinion was expressed by respondents pertaining to the age groups of 60-65, 40-49 and 50-59, and also – respondents considering the financial status of their household bad or satisfactory.

(3) «You cannot be completely sure they are really organic foods» – The scepticism of consumers regarding the content of organic foods is indicative (Fig. 5). The predominant part of respondents (70%) agreed or completely agreed with the statement that "you cannot be completely sure that they are really organic foods". Only 5.6% of people did not share this opinion. The lack of trust in the label can also be explained with the presence of over 200 designations of organic foods, which confuses consumers when choosing and prevents the clear differentiation of organic foods from conventional ones.

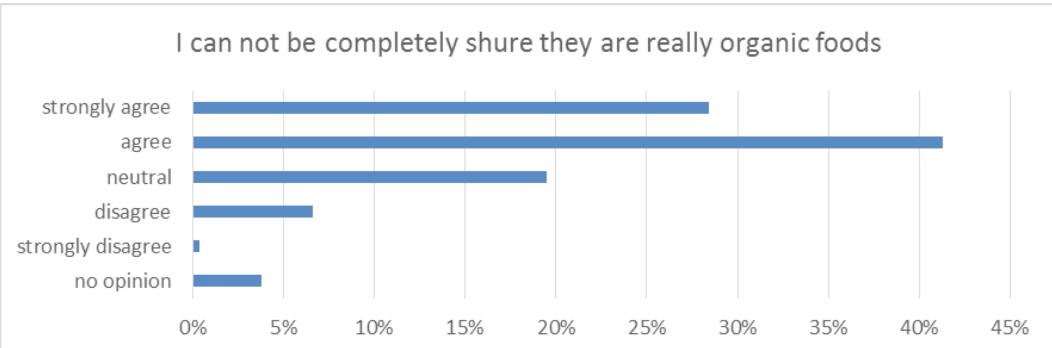

Figure 5. *Trust in organic food label*

Demographic analysis shows that regarding this matter women are again relatively more sceptical than men. Respondents in the age groups of 40-49 and over 65 years of age had the lowest trust in the label of organic foods, and also married and divorced people and households with satisfactory financial status. No significant differences in the opinions were observed in terms of education and place of residence.

(4) «Their prices make them inaccessible to most people» – The opinion expressed by the predominant part of respondents that «the prices of organic foods make them

inaccessible to most people» is relevant to the previous opinion that «the prices of organic foods are unreasonably high». As was already mentioned, precisely the prices were cited as the main obstacle to buying organic foods: 82.9% thought that the high prices made them inaccessible to most people; only 3.5% shared the opposite opinion.

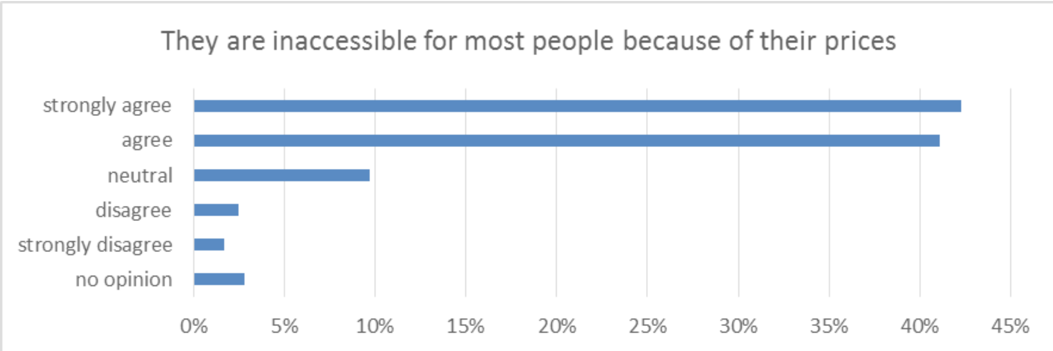

Figure 6. *Price accessibility and ability to buy organic foods*

The demographic analysis of the respondents showed that 86% of women and 79.9% of men expressed such an opinion. Notwithstanding that in all age groups the opinion was shared by more than 80% of respondents, the percentage was the highest in the age group of 40-49 years of age (92.4%).

(5) «They are healthier than conventional foods» – 63.5% believed that organic foods were healthier than conventional foods. In contrast to the opinions on the matters above, where the influence of demographic and personal demographic factors was relatively insignificant, as regards the «healthiness of organic foods» some regularities can be deduced.

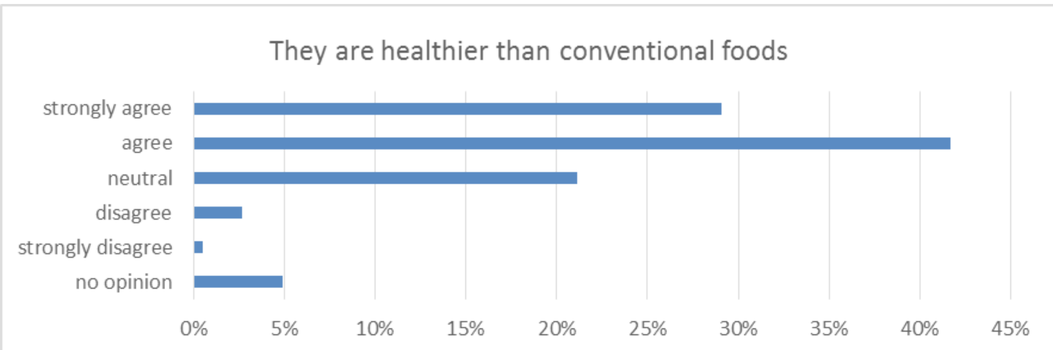

Figure 7. Attitudes towards organic food nutrition and health benefits

It is obvious that the greater part of women considered organic foods healthier than conventional foods (72.7%), while 69.4% of men shared that opinion. Such a situation can be explained with the distribution of roles in households – usually women are «responsible» for buying food for the household, taking care of children and are significantly more involved in the process of looking for information and are more sensitive to the quality of the foods bought.

In terms of marital status the greatest share of people considering organic foods healthier were married people (73.1%), and in the other categories the shares were similar.

A clear interdependency between the level of education and the perception of organic foods as healthier was manifested: this was the opinion of 43.6% of people with lower or no education; 68.7% of people with secondary education; 74.8% of people with college education; 76.1% of people with higher education.

In terms of age there were also some dependencies: the lowest and the highest age groups were the least inclined to perceive organic foods as healthier.

The perception of organic foods as healthier is influenced insignificantly by the place of residence and the financial status of households, although it must be noted that people living in villages and households with a bad financial status share that opinion to the lowest extent.

The analysis of the opinions gives us ground to outline two paradoxes: in terms of health and in terms of prices:

As a rule, clients buy organic foods mainly because of the healthiness associated with them. That is interesting because there is no scientific proof convincing enough that they are healthier than conventional foods. It is obvious that such attitudes are formed mainly as a result of media propaganda.

As was established, the predominant part of consumers considered the high price (combined with mistrust) an «obstacle» to the purchase and consumption: they did not believe that the benefits of organic foods were worth the high price premium that must be paid. Still, the high price is a differentiating factor and a sign of a superior quality – when the price of organic foods is low doubts arise and people think their quality and nutritional benefits are lower, i.e. they are not so healthy. These paradoxes must be rationalised and a balance between these two forces must be achieved.

(6) «There is a lack of reliable control over the production of organic foods in our country» – One of the reasons for the scepticism specified in Fig. 5 regarding the organic content and nutritional value of organic foods can be found in the shared opinion of «the lack of reliable control over the production of organic foods» (Fig. 8.). 67.1% of respondents believed that there was no such control here. 70.2% of men and 66.6% of women expressed that opinion. The other demographic characteristics (education, age, place of residence, financial status, marital status) did not lead to significant differences in the opinions on the matter.

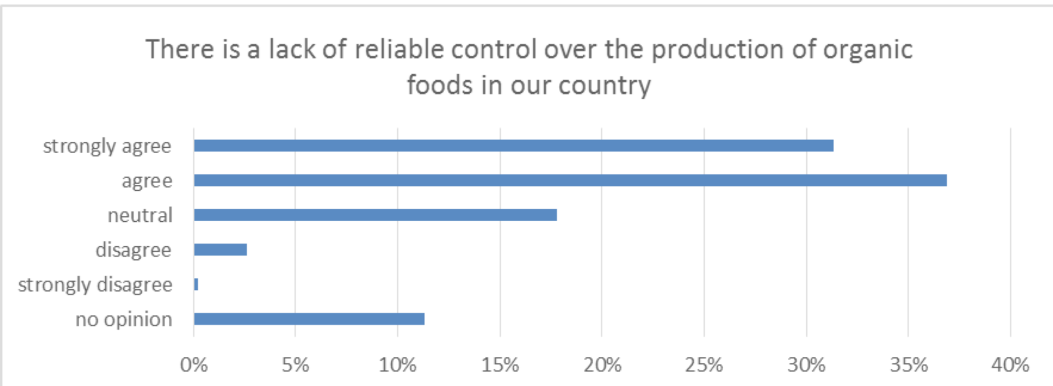

Figure 8. *Attitudes towards control over the production of organic foods in Bulgaria*

Based on the statistical analysis of the answers of the questions above, the general («collective») attitude of Bulgarian consumers towards organic foods can be outlined (Fig. 9.).

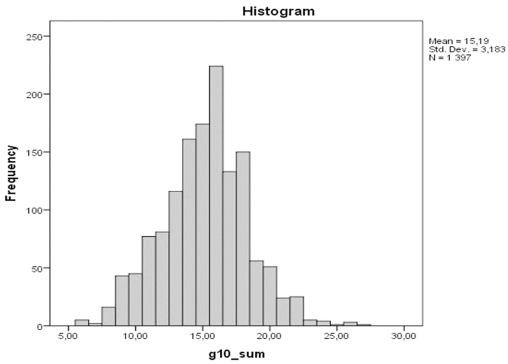

Figure 9. *General attitude of Bulgarian consumers towards organic food*

Fig. 9. shows that the total scores of the answers to the six questions are focused around the median (15.9), i.e. the general attitude of Bulgarian consumers towards organic foods is predominantly neutral. The votes «in favour» and «against» them were balanced with a slight preponderance of the people liking them (51.5%). An insignificant percentage (0.4%) of the respondents had a completely positive attitude towards organic foods (a total score of 5), and at the same time there were no respondents with a completely negative attitude (a total score of 30).

In households which do not buy organic foods economic and cultural motives predominate

The analysis of the data shows that almost one-third of households (28.2%) have never bought organic foods. This is completely logical for the relatively early phase of the development of this market in Bulgaria, but the question remains as to what are the reasons for this? The realisation of these reasons could help reach consumer insight and stimulate and give proper direction to marketing activities on the organic food market.

People who do not buy organic foods belong mainly to the age group of over 65 years of age. These are usually pensioners living in a village or in a small town, widowed or divorced, poorly educated people with a monthly household income below BGN 500/1000. In general, they assess their financial status as bad or satisfactory. They use to satisfy their needs for the above-mentioned categories of foods through home-grown production.

The main reasons given as free answers by respondents in the research are analysed and summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. *Reasons why households have never bought organic foods*

Reasons why households have never bought organic foods	Opinions	Number of instances (N)	%
Prices are perceived as too/unreasonably high	«they are too expensive for me», «outrageously expensive», «extremely and unreasonably expensive», «prices I can't afford», «I haven't been able to give so much money»	173	39.87
Own production is considered a better alternative to buying organic foods	«I use my own production», «I use only home-grown products», «I produce products for home consumption», «we rely on our parents who grow their own organic products»	98	22.58
There is mistrust of the label and doubts regarding the organic origin and quality of organic foods in general	«lack of clear and proven origin», «I don't believe what's written on the label», «I'm not convinced they are organic», «there is no control over organic products»	89	20.50

Reasons why households have never bought organic foods	Opinions	Number of instances (N)	%
As a result of the limited points of sale of organic foods, access to them is difficult or impossible	«they are difficult to find in the supermarkets», «there are no organic foods in my town», «there are no designated stands in the stores where I shop», «they can't be found very often», «there is no supply near my home», «there are no such products in small towns and villages», «I haven't seen places where they are sold»	41	9.45
There is a lack of information about organic foods	«I haven't been interested in organic foods», «I haven't come across them», «they are expensive and I don't exactly know what it's about»	16	3.68
The taste properties of organic foods and their appearance are perceived as not good enough	«their taste is worse than the others», «I don't like them», «the appearance of the fruits and vegetables is not attractive» «the organic boza (traditional Bulgarian barley drink) is disgusting»	9	2.07
There is a lack of perceived notable differentiation between ordinary and organic foods	«they are not different from each other», «I think they are overly praised», «they grow on the same soil»	7	1.61
Organic foods are perceived as a trend which will fade	«I'm irritated by this trend»	1	0.24
TOTAL		**434**	**100**

Therefore, some of the main "obstacles" to the greater consumption of organic foods are:

- The prices of organic foods are considered high (40%). The main obstacle for the purchase of organic foods is their relatively high/premium price. Hypothetically, consumers are inclined to pay the premium price but in reality they consider it high and that affects their actual consumption. Such behaviour can also be explained with the low level of awareness about the characteristics of organic food production and their differences from conventional production. We may assume that the willingness to pay a higher price would increase in the presence of responsible attitude towards the environment, high health culture and requirements towards food safety, in the presence of children in the family, etc.
- A preferred alternative to organic foods are foods of own production (23%). We may assume that the higher the satisfaction with the available source/supplier of natural foods, the lower the inclination to search for and buy organic foods.
- There is a mistrust of the origin, quality and control of organic foods (20%), i.e. a serious reason for the nonbuying of organic foods is the scepticism regarding the products/brands which are advertised as organic and the control over their production.
- In 10% of cases organic foods are described as difficult to access or inaccessible. The lack of access to organic foods or the inconveniences in buying them is the fourth most important reason.

The rest of the specified reasons are less significant but must not be ignored by producers and traders of organic foods: lack of informedness; perceived bad taste properties and appearance (organic foods usually don't have such attractive appearance as conventional foods); lack of perceived notable differences from conventional foods. The obstacles described can be "lowered" by developing adequate marketing measures for influencing: increasing the awareness and decreasing the scepticism regarding organic foods; differentiation from conventional foods; provision of suitable distribution and placement in the inner store space and shelf positioning (merchandising); presenting and communicating the benefits of organic foods; using flexible price systems, etc.

Together with the low purchasing power, one of the main reasons for the nonbuying of organic foods is the low level of awareness of consumers about them. The results of the research show that:

- Bulgarian consumers are not well informed about the methods of production of organic foods. Only 6.9% of them assessed their knowledge of the production processes of organic foods as very good, and 17.7% – as good. The share of people who considered themselves poorly informed or completely uninformed about organic production was high (44.3%). As regards age, awareness about organic food production is logically lowest in younger people, who have little life and consumer experience, and increases with age. The level of education also affects knowledge – it was established that people with lower education have the lowest degree of knowledge, and those with college education – the highest (this may be due to the fact that part of them have experience as middle executive staff in food producing sectors). In terms of place of residence, people who live in small towns and villages prove to be most knowledgeable, which can be explained with personal engagement in the production of natural plant and animal food products.
- Bulgarian consumers are not well informed about the qualities of organic foods. One-fourth of respondents believed they knew the qualities of organic foods well and very well; the predominant part of them had vague knowledge of that (61.1%); and 13% lacked any knowledge of organic foods.
- Bulgarian consumers are not well informed where organic foods are sold. Only one-tenth of the respondents had a very good knowledge of points of sale where organic foods were sold. The percentage of people who were not informed or were poorly informed about this was high (34.9%). In contrast to the stated knowledge of the methods of production and qualities of organic foods, women were considerably better informed of the places where organic foods were sold. In terms of age, knowledge of the places where organic foods can be bought was higher among younger people (up to 39 years) and decreased with age. The level of education also affected knowledge – among people with lower education the lowest level of knowledge was established, and in those with college or higher education – the highest. In terms of place of residence, people living in the capital proved to have the best knowledge, and people living in villages – the lowest level of awareness, which was explained with the higher distribution penetration and the presence of a considerably higher marketing activity of companies selling organic foods in the capital and bigger cities.
- Bulgarian consumers are relatively well-informed about the price levels of organic foods. 34.2% of respondents declared very good and good knowledge of the prices of organic foods; 32.9% had relative knowledge of that; 32.5% were poorly informed or completely uninformed. In terms of awareness about the prices of organic foods, women were again considerably better informed.

Consumer motives for buying and consuming organic foods in Bulgarian households

Several studies have shown that environmental care is one of the main motivational factors in terms of organic food consumption as well as health concerns and lifestyle. Motivation for their purchase and consumption varies on different national markets. In the USA, the main motive is their perception as healthier than conventional foods; in a great number of European countries, purchases are "driven" by motives connected to environmental protection; in China – by their higher quality and safety. On the basis of the present research, possible consumer motives for the purchase and consumption of organic foods in Bulgarian households can be deduced by classifying them in the following manner:

First, the concern with people's own health and the health of their family members, where organic foods are perceived as synonymous with "pure food". As was established, organic foods are mostly perceived as healthier compared to the products of conventional food industry, i.e. the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle can be viewed as the main motive for their purchase. At the same time they are perceived as more nutritive, i.e. more beneficial.

Second is the low trust in the conventional food industry and the safety of foods it produces. The frequent articles about the presence of various harmful ingredients, bacteria (Escherichia coli, salmonella), diseases («mad cow»), etc. in conventionally produced foods reduce trust in traditional production. Consumers view the methods of production of organic foods as providing greater food safety.

Third comes the better quality and taste of organic foods. As a rule, the relatively high prices of organic foods affect their perception as products of better quality than the conventionally produced, hence – perception of their taste as better.

Other motives for the purchase of organic foods also appear. Although not so important as the maintenance of health, nostalgia (organic food consumption is associated with the tastes of the past; it's believed they are close to the «real» food consumed once) and fashion (the desire to keep up with fashion, to copy the behaviour of people with a higher social status and maintain a higher standard of living, and to test new things comes to the fore) are among the possible motives for organic food consumption. Concern for the environment, humane animal treatment, as well as the desire to support small producers and local economics (ethnocentric tendency) are of relatively little significance. Based on the relatively short expiration periods of organic foods, the opinion that real organic foods are locally produced or produced in small family farms becomes increasingly popular. It is not a coincidence that answering the question «Organic foods from which countries do you personally trust the most?», Bulgaria was named first (276 times), followed by Germany (234) and France (40).

Conclusion

The organic food market in Bulgaria is at the formation and structuring phase. Although small in size, it is growing at a fast pace as a result of the combined effect of various factors: tendency towards a healthy lifestyle and the increasing health culture of Bulgarian consumers; increase of local production and import of organic foods; widening of the distribution network; intensification of competition and diversification of the marketing strategies of producers and traders; relative decrease in the prices of organic foods.

On the basis of this research, we can draw the conclusion that egotistic motives «overtake» altruistic ones in organic food consumption – concern for people's own health and the health of their family members; lack of trust in the conventional food industry and the safety of foods it produces; fashion and lifestyle imitation are leading motives. Motives which "drive" truly green consumers are less widespread: concern for the environment; support of small producers and local economics; humane animal treatment.

From the analysis made we can conclude that there is a discrepancy between positive attitudes and actual consumption: the low level of purchase and consumption of organic foods in Bulgarian households is due to economic reasons, as well as to cultural ones (low level of awareness and trust, skepticism and rejection, set habits of own production of natural foods, etc.). The research results could provide organic food producers and traders with consumer insights and could help them in developing appropriate marketing strategies.

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