

## WHO IS THE CONSUMER OF ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS?

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**Abstract.** *The main objective of this paper is to present the characteristics of consumers of organic food products (PAE). They are analyzed in terms of socio - demographic (gender, number of children, age, education), economic (disposable income), lifestyles, shared values. Also, specific attention is given to the specific purchase and consumption behaviors and barriers which prevents the fast market development. Findings - The paper shows that social - demographics variables are not the most effective for the consumer understanding. More important are the values to which the consumers adhere. Values that determine the market development varies depending on the degree of market maturity. The largest consumers are those of "heavy" type but "medium" and "light" consumers show a great importance as buyers but also as vectors for promotion. The most important obstacles to the acquisition of PAE are low availability and high prices of these products. **Originality / value** - This paper explores the determinants of acquisition and consumption of PAE and consumer characteristics also. The ideas in this paper can be used by marketers from PAE field.*

**Keywords:** organic food products, consumer, value, barrier.

### INTRODUCTION

There is a growing demand for organic food products (PAE), driven by consumers perception on product quality and safety, but also on the impact of agricultural practices over environment. Although the situation varies from country to country in terms of type and amount of PAE products, in all European Union countries has increased greatly the number of organic farms from the 1992 reform of common agricultural policy. PAE manufacturers must know the profile of the consumer in order to implement an appropriate marketing mix. There are a lot of cases of initiatives on this market that resulted in failures because of insufficient awareness of consumers.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

The paper is based on the investigation of secondary sources, the literature concerning PAE consumers in Europe. **Socio - demographic segmentation criteria.** The gender affects the relationship between consumers and PAE. It was found that a greater proportion of women are consumers of PAE, unlike men. The same difference is also reflected in the attitude towards these products (Aertsens *et al.*, 2009). It can be said that women often buy the PAE in comparison with men and that women buy large quantities from a single acquisition (Davies *et al.*, 1995). Among experts there are opinions that the higher proportion of women concerning the purchase of organic food is because of the fact that women deal with the family food supply more than men (Torjusen *et al.*, 2004).

The existence of childrens in a family causes appearance or growth of organic foods consumption. After giving birth, women change their consumption habits, using more organic food in the daily menu for the whole family. This behavior is motivated primarily by a desire to avoid potential health problems for children. PAE consumption of a household will decrease when children reach adolescence and begin to choose the food they want, but will increase after the children will found their families and parents' disposable income will be higher. Although the presence of children in a household positively influences the attitude towards organic food, it can be said that household income has a strong influence on the transformation of positive attitude on acquisition (Davies *et al.*, 1995).

Age influence both the acquisition of PAE, as well as reasons for purchase. European consumers under the age of 45 years consume these foods being concerned of the environmental problems and health worries too, while consumers aged over 45 years are primarily motivated by health problems. In Europe, the typical consumer of PAE has between 30 and 49 years. The age affects consumption differently depending on market maturity. Thus, younger consumers are among the first to adopt these products on the markets in developing, while older consumers have a higher proportion on the developed markets (Mildmore *et al.*, 2005). Regarding the amount of organic food purchased, it was found that there are no differences between elderly and young. Young people are more willing to pay a differential higher price for organic food, while elderly people are willing to pay a smaller difference in price for such products (Davies *et al.*, 1995).

Education, as a socio-demographic variable, is important because the proportion of consumers with higher education is higher than the proportion of consumers with secondary education on less developed markets. The difference between these two segments are leveled when the market is already developed, when those with secondary education begin to adopt PAE in higher proportion.

**Lifestyle.** In more mature markets, it was found that along with socio-demographic variables, lifestyle can be an effective criterion for segmentation. Lifestyle is an integrated set of practices which an individual chooses to give material form of his self-identity. PAE consumption is also linked to the adoption of alternative lifestyles: vegetarianism, environmentalism and alternative medicine (Torjusen *et al.*, 2004).

Organic food consumption suggests the existence of alternative lifestyles, based on healthy, safety and quality, styles that depend on the dominant culture in society (Farinello Pellegrini, 2009). People who consume organic products are seen as innovative, courageous, with cosmopolitan leanings on social relations. In addition to consumers who have a socially oriented lifestyle, there is a consumer group, more numerous, whose motives are egocentric.

**Values that consumers adhere.** Worner and Meier-Ploeger (1999) argues that the values that the individual adheres, are more and more important than socio-demographic factors, regarding the influencing the demand for PAE. Values are stable factors of motivation, abstract goals setting standards to which is directed the behavior. Values are central to people's lives and because of their importance they influence attitudes and behaviors. Values effectively explain human behavior,

because they serve as standards of conduct, they are few in number, are universally recognized in all cultures and are stable over time (Krystallis Chryssohoidis, 2005).

There were identified several sets of values that influence attitude and behavior of PAE consumer. Thus, Aertsens *et al.* (2009) suggest the following list of values: security, meaning health, harmony, security and stability of society. This is the most important reason for buying organic food; pleasure felt by consumers due to its special taste is a strong factor in motivating consumers effectively; curiosity, novelty is also especially important when the consumer makes first acquisition;-universalism, in the sense of understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protecting the welfare of all beings positively influence the consumption of organic food; willingness towards local farmers stimulates only a small proportion from the consumers of organic food (Aertsens *et al.*, 2009); differentiation from others, acts as motivator factor for some consumers, especially in Greece (and Krystallis Chryssohoidis, 2005); desire of conformity influence attitude towards organic food rather than the intention to purchase them. However, it is an indirect influence on actual purchase behavior because attitude positively influence the purchase intention and intention positively influences purchase (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005); power, prestige, social status negatively influences consumption of organic food (Dreezens *et al.*, 2005).

**Attitude.**In the case of PAE, the interactions between cognitive and affective components of attitude are highly complex. There are those where is predominant the affective component, while for others the cognitive component predominates. In case of a conflict between these two components will prevail the emotional component (Aertsens *et al.*, 2009). Also, the reaction time of a consumer subjected to a emotional stimulus is shorter than for cognitive stimulus. The most important emotional component are emotions that can lead to the acquisition of PAE (Verhoef, 2005).

**Types of purchasing and consumption behavior.** The amount of organic food that a person consumes is influenced by the level of market development. Lisa Squires *et al.* (2001) shows that the group of "heavy" consumers are motivated by different values, depending on the level of market development. Thus, if the market is mature as the Danish market, the consumers of "heavy" type are more likely motivated by environmental arguments. On a less developed market such as New Zealand market for organic food, is better the motivation of "heavy" consumers, with arguments related to their health and families. These findings should be used when are running communication programs on organic food.

Midmore *et al.* (2005) divides consumers into four groups according to the proportion of food budget spent on organic food. Thus, there are consumers of "heavy" type, which spend over 10% from the feed budget for organic foods. Consumers of "environment" type have an organic proportion from the food budget which varies between 2.5% and 10%. Consumers of "light" type spent under 2.5% of budget on organic food. The last category refers to non consumers, that do not eat at all organic. Consumers of "heavy" type represent the hard nucleus of organic products market and are willing to pay higher price differences for an organic food compared to the same food product in the conventional variant.

Consumers "heavy" are the most loyal buyers OTC distribution channels (direct from the farm, peasant markets, etc.), although most of their spending for PAE is made in supermarkets. However, for the market development is recommended an efficient approach for the other categories of consumers who are more prices sensitive.

Higher income stimulates both a favorable attitude and purchase of such products (Tsakiridou *et al.*, 2006). However, the influence of income on the acquisition of PAE becomes negative when income goes above a certain level (Dreezens *et al.*, 2005). The influence of income is different, depending on education, personality, social class and individual aspirations. There are consumers of PAE that do not have disposable income very large, but still consume these products in order to search for emotional satisfaction.

Urban or rural residence influences the acquisition of PAE in a lesser way on the developed markets. In such markets consumer awareness is higher, PAE are more available and, therefore, purchases are made at about the same level, regardless of residence.

**Barriers to the acquisition of PAE.** One of the most important barriers is the high price of these products. Young people value the environment purity more but are less willing to pay a higher price because of lower income (Tsakiridou *et al.*, 2006). The importance of price as a barrier is decreasing due to the supermarkets entry on the market (Reuters, 2002). Those who regularly consume PAE consider the price a lower barrier than those who consume less frequently or are non consumers (Torjusen *et al.*, 2004).

The limited availability of PAE is a barrier in a number of marketing researches (Mintel, 2003, Paddle and Foster, 2005). PAE availability is reduced especially in smaller communities, there being situations where these products were difficult to find in supermarkets, even if they were in their offer (Essoussi and Zahaf, 2009).

Mistrust comes from the lack of information on how to issue the certificate of organic farmer (and Zahaf Essoussi, 2009). Paddle and Foster (2005) discovered that, in Britain, consumers have less confidence in PAE from supermarkets or supplied by corporations. A possible explanation is that supermarkets have a purely functional role, while workers from small shops specializing in PAE present the "product story", addressing to the profound desires of PAE the consumer. PAE poor visual quality is less important for people with higher education in Greece. Poor visual quality compared to higher price affects more non consumers (Tsakiridou *et al.*, 2006).

Previous habits are also a barrier to purchase these PAE (Magnusson *et al.*, 2001). Other barriers are: lack of information is an important problem to be solved by carrying out campaigns to inform and educate both the buyers and the non consumers. It is important to note that both categories want to be better informed about these products (Paddle and Foster, 2005); unattractive packaging; consumers are satisfied with the food produced in the conventional system.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I structure a part of the literature in this field. Although socio-demographic criteria have some significance for understanding the market PAE, it must be taken into account other criteria for market segmentation, such as lifestyle and personal values. There are some studies that show that women consume more PAE but if we take into account several works in this area results that differences between men and women are small regarding to the acquisition and use of PAE. Consumers of PAE do not share demographic characteristics, instead they share moral values.

The most important values are the values of self-centered, as opposed to altruistic values. Health, a value attached to a concept of safety, is the most motivating value for consumers. Also of great importance are taste and universalism.

Market development strategies must start from its current level. On a less developed market, the focus should be on of PAE sanogenetic character, while on a mature market, are effective communications which have as axle of communication the idea of environmental protection .

Marketing researches are needed to provide more information about the values, attitudes, intentions and purchase and consumption behavior ,of all four segments (buyers heavy, medium, light and non consumers) because fast market development can be done by attracting the medium and light consumers, which are more sensitive to PAE price issues, and the ones who buy, initially, PAE with prices close to the prices of food products produced in conventional system.

Income positively affects the acquisition of PAE, however, by using some emotional arguments ,can be attracted groups of users that do not have high income

Developed markets have similar proportions of consumers in urban and rural areas, while on immature markets dominates the urban consumers. In rural areas there is a tendency to buy directly from farmers, unlike consumers in urban areas where there was observed a predilection to purchase at the supermarket.

To increase consumption of PAE must be initiated actions to overcome the greatest barriers (limited availability and high prices PAE). Entry of supermarkets in this market would reduce prices and increase PAE availability. Other barriers are lack of confidence of consumers in the certification system of PAE, lack of information, poor appearance of PAE sometimes, old habits of consumers and poor packaging. It is necessary to conduct public information campaigns, including campaigns aimed for children and students.

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