

CONSUMPTION OF ORGANIC FOOD AND CONSUMERS AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of organic production and processing is highly determined by market demand. Therefore, this is reflected in consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards organic food products. This research draws on a survey of 100 respondents. Results indicated that the main reasons for purchasing organic food products are an expectation of a healthier and environmentally friendly means of production. Organic buyers tend to be older and higher educated than those who do not buy them. In addition, consumers' trust in the authenticity of the goods and price are also issues. However, the main barrier to increase the market share of organic food products is consumer information.

Keywords: Organic Food, Consumer Behavior, Food Labels, Consumer Awareness

I. INTRODUCTION

Food consumption patterns are changing as a result of health and environmental issues. Interest in organically produced food is increasing throughout the world. Global demand for organic products is increasing by over five billion US dollars a year (Willer, Yussefi-Menzler, and Sorensen 2009). In India accompanied by modernization and past, subsistence agriculture, was part of a traditional system in which farmers produced foods mainly for family consumption and exchanged the surplus with neighbours. In order to maximize yields, farmers started to use chemical fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides in large quantities (UNDP 2007). This has led to increasing problems related to economics, health hazards, and environmental issues. Investigations have shown that dangerous levels of pesticides are used in food production. Based on this information, government agencies and NGOs in India have focused their attention on organic agriculture.

Organic agriculture is one of the sustainable agriculture approaches that are being promoted and practiced extensively in the province. Indian organic agriculture is still at an early stage, the organic production area being less than 0.05% of total agricultural land. An additional factor was that farmers were not convinced that there was a secure market channel for organic products. Certification informs the consumer of the undesirable and unobserved pesticides that may or may not have been used in the production of food. Organic farming is a growing sector in India, which is encouraged by the government and many private initiatives. Therefore, production is expected to rise to meet the growing demand in the domestic market for organic foods. The increased range of healthy foods and the establishment of certificates for pesticide controlled vegetables indicate that there is a potential market. Consumers everywhere know very little about the production process, as there is

no identification with the product and its producer. So it has to be explored how much knowledge of organic farming consumers already have, and how they would like to be more informed.

Therefore, the present paper aims to understand the perceptions and attitudes towards organic food products in bhopal, to collect detailed information of the demographic characteristics and to identify the reasons affecting consumers' behavior towards organic food products.

Organic farming is a system which avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetic inputs (such as fertilizers, pesticides, hormones, feed additives etc) and to the maximum extent feasible rely upon crop rotations, crop residues, animal manures, off-farm organic waste, mineral grade rock additives and biological system of nutrient mobilization and plant protection.

II. NEED FOR ORGANIC FARMING

Increase in population make compulsion to stabilize agricultural production, but to, increase it further, in sustainable manner. Natural balance needs to be maintained at all cost for existence of life and property. Agrochemicals which are produced from fossil fuel and are not renewable and are diminishing in availability. It may also cost heavily on our foreign exchange in future

Characteristics :Nitrogen self-sufficiency through the use of legumes and biological nitrogen fixation, as well as effective recycling of organic materials including crop residues and livestock manures Weed, disease and pest control relying primarily on crop rotations, natural predators, diversity, organic manuring, resistant varieties and limited (preferably minimal) thermal, biological and chemical intervention. The extensive management of livestock, paying full regard to their evolutionary adaptations, behavioral needs and animal welfare issues with respect to nutrition, housing, health, breeding and rearing. Careful attention to the impact of the farming system on the wider environment and the conservation of wildlife and natural habitats.

2.1 Basic Steps of Organic Farming:

Organic farming approach involves following five principles:

1. Conversion of land from conventional management to organic management
2. Management of the entire surrounding system to ensure biodiversity and sustainability of the system
3. Crop production with the use of alternative sources of nutrients such as crop rotation, residue management, organic manures and biological inputs.
4. Management of weeds and pests by better management practices, physical and cultural means and by biological control system
5. Maintenance of live stock in tandem with organic concept and make them an integral part of the entire system

III. METHODOLOGY

The survey was undertaken in two stages. First, a face-to-face survey was made in 2013 in bhopal. The survey was performed with a systematic sampling of consumers. No claims can be made that the sample group represents the general populations. However, the fact that the consumers are interested in organic foods, suggests that survey respondents provide an interesting study group for this issue. The second part of the survey

was carried out during 2014 at markets, the Tops supermarkets of Bhopal city. Finally, Tops supermarket is a grocery chain in Bhopal city. Tops supermarket offers a wide assortment of food, products and vegetables. Tops supermarket sells safety, organic products. Consumers were approached during their food shopping in outlets at different areas. All the markets which carry organic food or a range of fruits and vegetables displaying the major safe food labels, were selected for the interviews. Finally, few students were trained to administer the questionnaire personally; from 100 respondents. The questionnaire was designed to analyze consumers' organic knowledge, attitudes and purchase behavior. Respondents were questioned on three different aspects. The first section was related to their organic food knowledge, i.e. organic food labels and organically produced food. The second section of the questionnaire was comprised of questions related to organic food consumption (frequency of purchase and perceived quality). Finally, several questions on the reasons of purchase, or not, were included. The questionnaire also contained questions on sociodemographic characteristics (i.e. gender, age, household size, education, personal income, and marital status). To analyze differences between consumer types, the respondents were divided into three groups: those who had never heard of organic produce (20% respondents); those who had heard of organic produce, but never purchased any (organic non-buyers: 35% respondents, those who had heard of and bought organic produce (the organic buyers: respondents, i.e. 45%.)

IV. RESULTS

The sample comprised of 63% female and 37% male, something that is expected since females are the main food purchase decision-makers in households. The age of the respondents varied from 18 to 70 years. More than half of them had a university education (53%), about 27% had finished high school and 19% of the respondents had completed only primary school. About 51% of the respondents received a monthly income less than 10,000, and 19% were above 20,000. More than half of the respondents (55%) lived in families with more than four members, more than a quarter (38%) had two-three family members, about 5% lived alone, and 39% of the respondents, were married. Consumers with a lower income (74%) and a lower level of education (40%) were least likely to have heard of organic agriculture. Conversely, those who had a higher income and held academic degrees seemed more likely to have bought organic foods in the past.

Those respondents who had purchased organic food in were asked about their motives. The most important motive was the expected positive health effects (a reason for 97% of the organic buyers). These expected positive health effects may be related to their being pesticide-free, as 90% of organic buyers said that they purchase organic food because they do not contain pesticide residues and 88% mentioned that organic foods have a high safety level of guarantee and control. About 94% of organic buyers purchased organic food because they are environmentally-friendly and support local farmers. Further reasons to purchase organic food were because they are fresher (64%) and have better taste (50%) when compared with conventional ones, or they think organic foods are fashionable (30%). Regarding the information available, 91% of consumers said they need more information about organic foods from the media. The respondents who have purchased organic foods were asked about the availability of organic foods and how often they purchase organic foods. The majority (88%) of organic buyers were satisfied with the range of organic foods available at markets. However 72% said

they would like to buy more organic foods if they had more income. Regarding their purchasing habits, 31% of the organic buyers stated that they purchase organic foods weekly, 23% said once per month and 47% said they are purchase organic foods less than monthly.

All those who have not previously bought organic foods (82 respondents, i.e. 23% of those who had heard the organic term) were asked why they do not purchase organic foods. The main reason was that they think hygienic and safety food products are enough (76%) and that organic foods are difficult to get in the market (76%). Further reasons were that they do not trust the organic label (31%) and some stated that organic foods have nothing special (29%).

Chi-square analysis showed that there were differences in consumer buying behavior with respect to different locations of the market in Bhopal city. It was found that respondents in the markets of new Bhopal tended more to purchase organic foods than respondents from the market of old Bhopal. The findings regarding awareness of food labels shows that respondents were not aware of organic food labels.

Regarding the 7 statements and asked whether they agreed or disagreed or whether they did not know, and their reasons to buy or not buy organic foods. The comparison shows that even though the respondents had visited different places, they had similar attitudes about organic foods and had no significant difference, i.e. 49% of respondents in old Bhopal and 51% of respondents in new Bhopal markets were convinced that organic farming is good for the environment and that organic foods do not carry pesticide residues. For those who do not buy organic foods, the main reason they gave was that hygienic and safety food products were enough (50% for new Bhopal and 40% for old Bhopal market).

V. DISCUSSION

The consumers of organic foods products in India tend to be older (average age of organic buyers about 36 years old) and hold academic degrees than those not purchasing organic foods. Older consumers (over 35 years old) seem to be more willing to purchase organic food products despite their premium price. Young consumers (less than 25 years old) are not willing to pay for organic food products usually as result of their lower-financial status. Females in Bhopal seem to be more likely to purchase organic food than males. Many of the organic buyers have children less than 18 years old living in the household. As a result, children have a large effect on the buying and decisions-making of their parents when they are buying food.

This could be identified as a link to increased levels of concern about food safety and health issues identified in these consumer groups. There are several main motives for purchasing organic foods in Bhopal city: the expected health and environmental benefits, the support of local or small farmers, the attraction of fashionable products, and the search for fresher and tastier products. Even though organic foods do not completely lack pesticide residue because of the pollution in the air and environment, they are safer than conventional foods that get pesticides directly (Dangour et al. 2009). The second important motive to purchase organic foods is that the consumers were considering that purchasing organic food products can support local and small farmers. The third motive to purchase organic food is the consumers' search for new trends of healthy food products. The fourth motive is related to organic attributes including fresher and tastier food (i.e. vegetables). The market for organic food is not potentially large. However, to be able to tap this potential customer base, it may be

necessary to clearly difference between organic and conventional foods price. Indeed the perception of price is important for consumers to purchasing organic foods, which the result shows that more than half of organic buyers said the price of organic foods was not a problem but organic food labels do not have a clear profile for consumers. The main barrier to purchasing organic foods is that the information consumers have between organic, safety and hygienic foods is not clear.

From the results it is observed that there is a lack of advertising of organic foods, 90 % of the consumers have confirmed a need to improve organic food advertising in Bhopal city.

However, awareness of food labels can increase the probability that consumers would purchase organic food, even if it costs more than conventional food. The study has shown that of the organic buyers, 44% see price as a limiting factor, and 51% of organic non-buyers mention it as a reason for not buying organic food products. This study shows that more than 50% of consumers do not purchase organic food products regularly, even though organic foods are healthy and do not contain pesticide residue. However, the awareness of organic labels and price still becomes an obstacle for consumers when making their decision for buying. Because consumers are still confused with many safe food labels, some consumers do not understand the price premium of organic food products.

The positive approaches could help the private sector to increase the market share of organic foods, such as increasing the purchasing frequency of organic buyers and encouraging the organic nonbuyers to try organic food products.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Organic food consumption is increasing because of concerns over environmental and health issues associated with food production. The increase in consumers' interest in organic food products has been attributed among other issues to the growing demand for food free from pesticides and chemical residues. With the present study an attempt is made to describe the existing situation regarding indian consumers' perceptions about organic foods. The main motives to purchase organic food products are health and environmental benefits, plus support for local or small farmers. In addition, an important factor that was revealed as a barrier to the development of organic foods is consumer information. Increased consumer awareness of organic labeling and their trust in organic labels as well as increasing the availability and range of organic food products, may be the most effective way of increasing their market share.

The organic buyers in bhopal city tend to be older, higher educated and more likely to have children in their household than those not purchasing organic food products. The study found that the groups of buyers and non-buyers have significant differences in demographic characteristics. However, age, household size, children in household, and education level seemed to have an effect on the perceptions of consumers. The main barrier of organic foods market share is the information available and consumer awareness. Results from this paper are of great importance because they provide valuable information on consumers in Bhopal city that can be used by policy makers in organic farming at the national and regional level

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