



# Organic Consumers Have Common Values (CONDOR)

The market for organically-produced food has expanded considerably in recent years but remains relatively small. So, what goes on inside the consumer's head when choosing between organic and non-organic, fresh and processed food products? The CONDOR project made a systematic and scientific examination of consumer decision-making processes involved. Its multi-disciplinary research team used methods to elicit consumers' core beliefs, emotional associations and moral concerns associated with their choices and developed a theoretical decision-making model. The results show common pan-European values for existing organic consumers, such as belief in positive health benefits of organic produce, and provide potential strategies for improved marketing of organic foods to current non-organic consumers.

### What do organic consumers think?

Although organic produce has now entered the mainstream food market across Europe and is no longer restricted to 'niche' buyers, it accounts for



less than 10% of total EU spending on food. Nevertheless, it is still a significant component of the food market and is set on a continued growth path in many EU countries.

But what are the decision-making choices that determine when or if consumers buy organic? If the organic market is to increase there is a need for systematic and scientific examination of the consumer decision-making processes involved in the choice between organic and non-organic produce. In particular, information on the role played by values and beliefs can feed into the marketing of organic food. Evidence from mature organic markets like Denmark suggests that once a variety of organic products become available in a number of outlets, consumers do start buying them and will eventually convert to organic food.

The CONDOR project brought together a multidisciplinary team from eight EU countries to examine this topic. It combined the development of methods for the segmentation of consumers based upon values and the elicitation of their affective (emotional) associations and moral concerns. It also involved building a theoretically-based consumer decision-making model. This model was tested in several EU member states and on selected consumer segments.

### Common values

The project developed common methods of collecting consumer views, created a model of consumer choice, conducted segmentation analysis and conducted a cross-country comparative study as well as a variety of dissemination activities. The researchers interacted with over 8 400 consumers from across Europe to build up databases of consumer attitudes, values, emotional and moral concerns in relation to organic foods. They found that their reasoning behind purchases were similar across countries as varied as Greece and Germany, Spain and Denmark.

The study found that what sets organic consumers apart from non-organic was unrelated to age, gender, education or income, but correlated with what they thought and felt about organic food and their



# Consumer science

belief in its potential benefits. Users of organic food have more positive beliefs than non-users. Improved taste, being more 'natural', contributing to a longer, healthier life, benefits for society and the environment were cited as key benefits of organic produce by shoppers. However, both users and non-users were united in citing negative aspects of organic food such as higher price and lower shelf life. It was found that regular consumers of organic food have more complicated belief structures, attitudes and values than non-organic consumers.

## Making a bigger organic market

The results revealed a common set of marketing messages that should be applicable to the whole European market. Health and taste are important factors when buying food. But for organic food, there is also a positive consequence for the environment and associated positive moral values. These are important attributes for differentiating organic food products in the market place. Consumers also need more and better information, which they trust, in order to be sure that they are buying organic. Better labelling to validate organic credibility is essential, especially in Southern Europe where levels of trust in organic produce are lower.

The study showed that if a consumer believes in the benefits of organic food, then price is not necessarily a barrier to purchase. However, availability is often an issue. The more available organic food is, the more consumers will buy it. The potential for a much larger organic market is clearly there.

By using the belief structures identified by CONDOR, it should be possible to overcome the issues of mistrust and uncertainties perceived by non-organic consumers and encourage them to start buying organic produce. If this is coupled with improved supply chain logistics, it will ensure growth in the organic market for both fresh and processed products.

## Motivational marketing

This project was the first to examine attitudes and behaviour in relation to both fresh and processed

organic food and to do so across a number of European Union Member States. It has provided a better understanding of the motivations underlying consumer behaviour and hence has direct implications for the development of EU industry in this area, for consumer representatives and for consumers themselves. Common belief structures exist across Europe and these will allow the translation of successful organic marketing techniques from mature to emerging organic food markets.

## More information

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## Project Essentials

### Full Project name:

Consumer Decision-making on Organic Products

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## Project Collaborators:

University of Surrey (UK), VTT Biotechnology (FI), National Institute of Research in Food and Nutrition (IT), Agricultural University of Athens (EL), University of Murcia (ES), Aarhus Business School (DK), Federal Research Centre for Nutrition and Food (DE), Uppsala University (SE)