

SOCIOCULTURAL AND ECONOMIC VALUES – ORGANIC FOOD CONSUMPTION IN FAIRS AND SUPERMARKETS IN CAMPINAS, SP .BRAZIL¹

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Abstract

This scientific research was meant to encompass the meaning of economic and sociocultural consumption and its relationship to human values such as: environmental respect, commitment to health principles, solidarity among rural and urban social groups, and economic aspects (prices etc).

The consumption of agro-ecological products was studied based on a socioeconomic and anthropological approach which focus was on the motivation and meaning of expenditure practices in the metropolitan region of Campinas, Sao Paulo State, Brazil. Consumers were asked questions related to the types of food, frequency of use, reasons for the consumer transition from conventional food to organic production, if this has been done sporadically or has become a day to day habit, the very occasion the goods are consumed and the symbolic value of the food itself. The purpose was to verify to what extent the consumer behavior shows cultural and economic values with reference to current ecological culture. The data analysis permitted the formation of a wide scenario on the urban consumer's profile of organic products in open fairs and grocery stores in the area of Campinas (SP). A variety of

¹ This scientific study is part of the research program named “*Organic production sustainability on a global view of the food chain*”, now *GLOBALORG*, which is part of a greater, more encompassing study on socioeconomic and urban factors that influence the consumption of agro-ecological products in China, Vietnam, Uganda, Egypt, Brazil and Argentina.

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views from the interviewed buyers present elements from a local economic and sociocultural context. The organic culture does not represent an independent social organization but includes developmental features of global and local societies that are linked to the movement and dynamics of the economy. Therefore, the understanding of cultural dynamics of each and every expenditure process can give meaningful clues to the current context of local relations and global exchanges.

Key words: agro-ecological consumption, socioeconomic values, global market, local market.

Introduction

The transition process from conventional agriculture to ecologically-based production has been escalated on a global scale, both in developed nations and in developing countries; such is the case in China, Vietnam, Uganda, Egypt and Brazil⁶. The leading factor that caused this growth has been the increased demand for imported organic products from developed nations in the northern hemisphere, apart from the steady growth of domestic markets in developing countries⁷. Another factor is the increase in sales of ecological products in supermarkets, open fairs and alternative sales stands. (KLEDAL, P. 2003)

Brazilian consumers and consumers in urban centers around the world are being exposed to a constant increase in the number of local and imported ecological products. Other than the improvement and environmental quality of converted areas, does this type of ongoing development contribute to the inclusion of small family producers and give way to small, socially sensitive businesses?

To answer these questions, an empirical research was carried out and important data was collected through interviews in two organic product fairs⁸ – Parque Ecológico and Bosque dos Jequitibás in Campinas (SP), and in the two main retail stores of the city – Grupo Carrefour and Grupo Pão de Açúcar.

Supermarket sales managers and consultants who are specialized in organic product markets were interviewed with the sole purpose of compounding the elements of this research.

¹ Researchers from Denmark who take part in the Globalorg Project carry out research on this subject in the countries mentioned above.

⁷Please refer to the scientific work of Abreu & Kledal & Pettan & Rabelo & Mendes (2008) .

⁸ In this paper the use of the term 'organic' is emphasized following the pattern defined by the Organic Product Law, which was approved in December 2007, for any production method that is based on ecological agriculture. This concerns the production and commercialization of products from different agricultural methods (organic, biodynamic, permaculture, natural, etc...), that present different application forms to the principles of agro-ecology. Legislation on organic production in Brazil has been sparked, in great part due to the concept of agro-ecology. However, apart from there being a great trend to certified products and production, there are some cases of non-certified products that are socially recognized. This represents trading that is wholly based on the direct relationship between producers and consumers; trade based on trust between the parties involved (a breakthrough on agro-ecology from Embrapa, 2006).

The first hypothesis of this research is that the consumption of organic products is associated to the start of an "Eco Culture", resulting from the process of an ever increasing environmental awareness, found in new social practices. These practices have stimulated new economic demands among groups of consumers, sparking new relations between food consumption, economy and ecology. Put differently, the integration of ecological food consumption is a reflex of a society that is experiencing a process of social and environmental appraisal. The second hypothesis relates to an economic aspect, in which the 'higher price' (superior price of organic products) hinders the growth of organic consumption in Brazil. This is also affected by the poor state of the distribution system, which is an important link to grocery stores and retail outlets located in middle and upper class neighborhoods in the country. The investigation on the consumption of organic products in fairs, supermarkets and retailers in Campinas (SP) was based on these assumptions.

As of this, the analysis unveils the food consumption pattern and the growing concern of consumers: which includes individualistic values – personal health and family; and altruistic values – related to the environment, and even concerning small-sized rural producers.

Methods

A strategy was used in order to capture the socio-cultural and economic reasons that are made visible by personal values, consumer choice and also by the underlying cultural logic. As of this, the analysis is based on the identification of striking attributes – consumers are asked questions regarding what concept is used to purchase and rate products. In the interviews the most important and striking identified attributes from the first phase are used as a starting point, causing the interviewed consumers to be

constantly queried with the following, for example: *“talk about this attribute..... Is it important to you or not”?*

The analysis of the research data mainly included the social, economic and cultural characterization of consumers of organic products from open fairs and grocery stores in Campinas (SP-Brazil), following the interpretation of some common values (individualistic and altruistic) that motivate these consumers to purchase this type of product and bring about economic and sociocultural consequences from the consumption of organic products.

Despite the fact that the synthetic reconstruction of consumer's buying habits wasn't added to the body plan of the GLOBALORG project at first, this option soon became an important method in the process of further understanding and revealing the elements that compose the entire logic of consumption and the very nature of the process of changing consumption habits.

The syntheses of these habits were carried out through the analysis of recorded, partially disclosed interviews. Thirty consumers were interviewed, 15 of whom buy organic products from open fairs held at Parque Ecológico and Parque dos Jequitibás in Campinas, SP. Individual interviews were also performed with 15 consumers that purchase organic products in grocery stores and supermarkets. The whole of the research also included managers of large retail chains and specialists in the organic market. The interviews were carried out in the months of June, August and September 2008. In an attempt to further clarify the concluded analysis, some aspects of the methodology will be presented together with the respective findings.

Discussion 01

A map was crafted containing the values that represent the added relations of all defined scales based on the individual viewpoint of each interviewee, making it possible to later identify the main worries among the entire group of interviewed people.

In order to standardize the interpretation of data the collected answers from the interviews were transformed into statistical data, graphs, charts and tables that will be presented and analyzed below.

1. Research with consumers from organic product fairs

From the 15 interviews that were carried out in fairs at Parque Ecológico and Bosque dos Jequitibás, in Campinas (SP-Brazil), 09 women and 06 men were interviewed; two of them being occasional buyers and thirteen frequent shoppers. All of them are Brazilian and fit in the age chart below.

<30	4
31-40	3
41-50	2
51-60	3
>60	3

Chart 1: Age range

Content of questions used in fairs

This research was carried out through the filling out of open questionnaires and through recorded interviews. Fifteen consumers who buy at organic product fairs in Campinas were presented with the questionnaire and were requested to take part in the recorded interviews - These were done simultaneously. Interviewees were encouraged to compare local organic products, imported organic products and conventional products.

- 1) Respond to questions related to their consumption attitudes.
- 2) Describe the individual that purchases and consumes each type of product.
- 3) Describe the individual that never purchases or consumes each type of product.
- 4) React to a discussion between three fictitious consumers.
- 5) Provide an opinion on the issues of the (Food Miles) transportation process, distribution method, and producers.

Result Findings

Open fairs are excellent selling points for local organic production, that comes from family-based agriculture because these provide fresh high quality products, don't require contracts and don't have a planned production system. When it comes to green/leafy products, fruit, horticulture and products derived from poultry farms, etc... there is an organic production hub centered on the green belt in the large metropolitan area of São Paulo and Campinas.

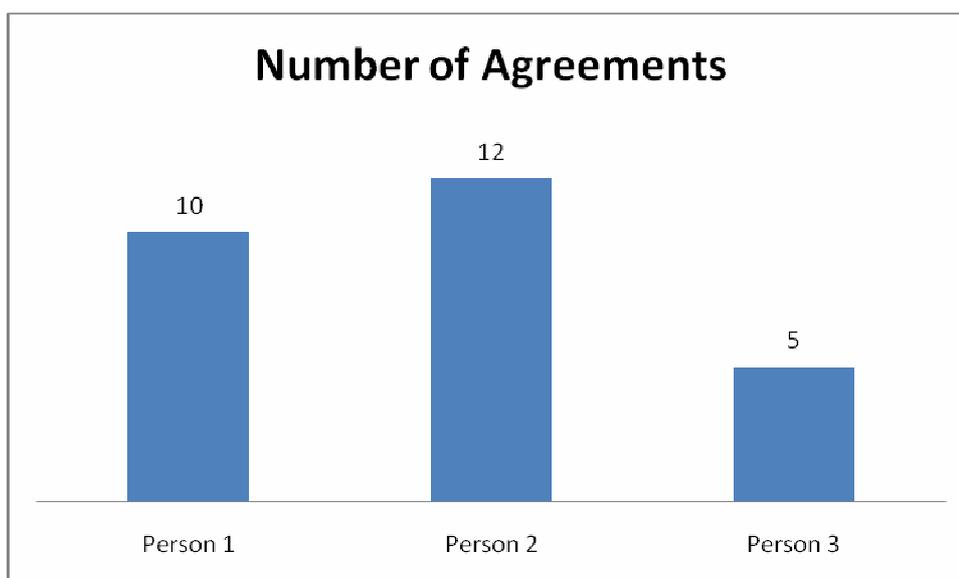
Fair salesmen don't work with very tight formal contracts; the trading relationship between the producer and the salesperson is normally an informal relationship. In this way, there is a favorable condition for family organic producers to supply to fairs since the volume of supply and demand is small, making the process of market regulation easier.

Discussion between three hypothetical people

This part of the interview consists of imagining a discussion between three individuals who have different viewpoints. These people attribute different values and importance to health issues, small producers, the environment, and to distribution.

- 1) The first person chooses organic products to ensure the family's health, motivate small-sized producers, and also for environmental reasons.
- 2) The second person focuses his/her choice on local and domestic organic products and does not buy products in retail stores or supermarkets.
- 3) The third person attributes great value to local production and product price; this person also buys local conventional products.

The figure below illustrates the difference of opinions – agreement or disagreement between each fictitious person.



Number of agreed items

1st person = 10

2nd person = 12

3rd person = 5

Person 1	Agree	Disagree
I buy organic products because they are good for my health and the health of my family	15	0
I buy organic products because they are good for the environment	10	5
I buy organic products in order to help small-sized producers	13	2
Organic products are good regardless of where they come from	2	13
Organic products are all the same, no matter where you buy them	0	15

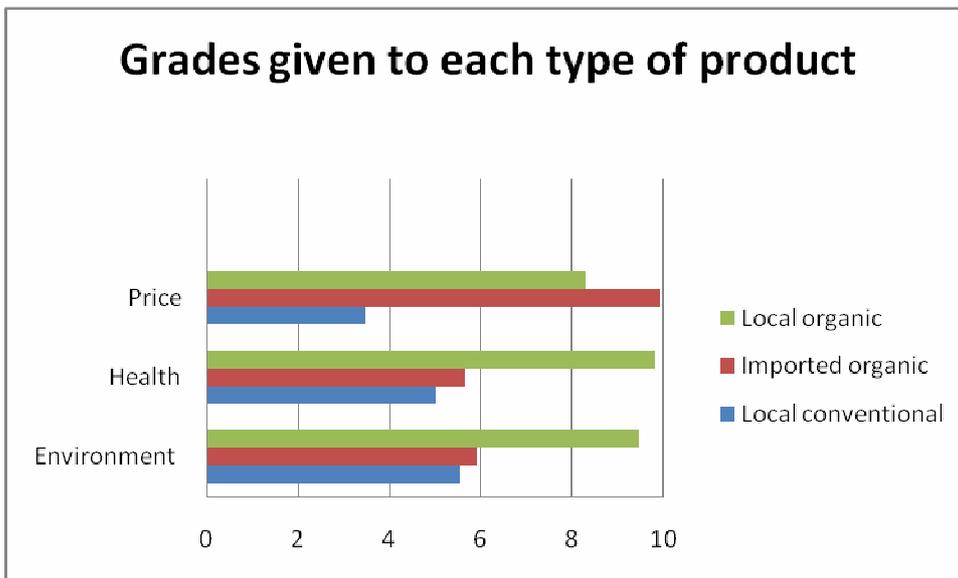
Person 2	Agree	Disagree
I pay attention to the origin of organic products	13	2
Organic products must be locally produced	12	3
Organic products shouldn't be sold in supermarkets and retailers	5	10
Organic products found in supermarkets and retailers are not good	13	2
Organic products in supermarkets and retailers don't help small-sized producers	14	1

Person 3	Agree	Disagree
I prefer a conventional local product to an imported organic product	14	1
I prefer a local product due to the pollution during the process of transportation of other products	2	
I prefer a local conventional product to an imported organic product due to the reduced price	12	3
There are organic products that are not produced by small-sized producers	3	12
If I want to help small-sized producers in this country it's better to buy local conventional products than buying organic products	2	13

Comparison between local, imported and conventional products

The interviewed people were encouraged to provide a grade for three types of products based on four criteria:

- A) Desire to purchase 0 = none, 10 = strong
- B) The environment 0 = bad for, 10 = good for the environment
- C) Price 0 = cheap, 10 = expensive



Local organic consumption sheet

Local organic products

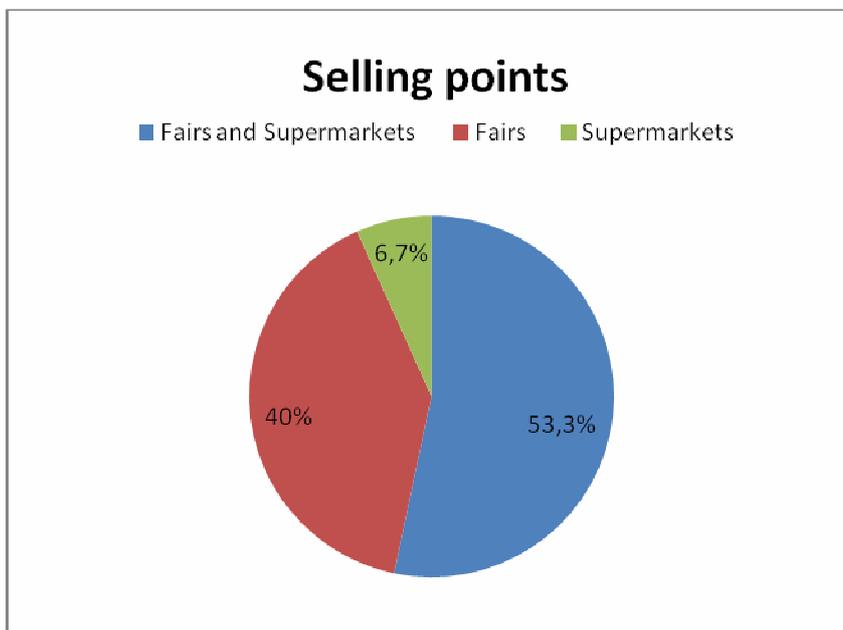


The above graph shows that 66.7% of the interviewed consumers consider local organic products to be above the price range or to be expensive. However, 26.7% think that the price of the products are in the mid range, while 6.6% consider prices to be low and the product to be inexpensive. As of this, concerning product prices we can say that prices are, in general, considered to be expensive.

However, regarding benefits to health and to the environment 100% of the interviewed people consider organic products to be very healthy and beneficial to the environment. Thus, we can observe that urban consumers from Campinas link organic products to the overall quality of health and the environment.

The collected data made it possible to analyze the preferences for each selling point. In this specific picture 53.3% of the interviewed people purchase in fairs as well as supermarkets and grocery stores. Forty percent only buy in fairs and 6.7% only purchase in supermarkets and grocery stores. Many interviews expose the fact that consumers enjoy buying in fairs but occasionally buy in supermarkets. The data shows us that the direct distribution method is preferred by the interviewed consumers.

Local organic products – Selling points



The data reveals that even if fairs present a strong consumption factor, supermarkets and grocery stores have an important role; mostly in the consumer's choice of selling points and purchasing locations in Campinas. This fact is related to the distribution pattern of organic products. Supermarkets are responsible for 43.9% of total distribution, while fairs represent 20.4% of the distribution chain.

Consumption paths

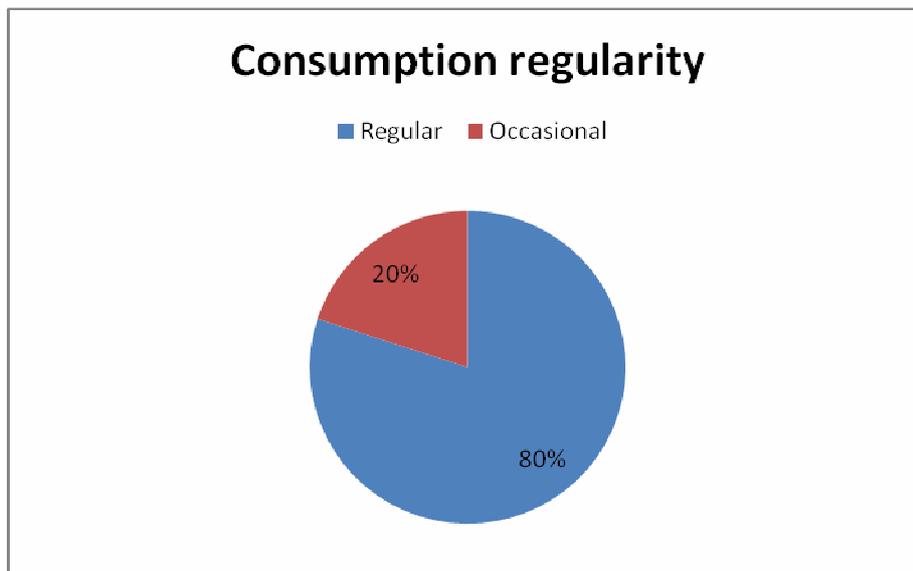
An additional effort in the method was to reconstruct the consumption paths; the overall scenario of the researched subject indicates that the conversion point to organic consumption happened mostly due to two fundamental factors that may or may not be associated to each other.

- 1) Experience with personal and family health problems – in such a way that there is a change from previous eating habits – this process can be quick, or somewhat slow, and this is directly related to the intensity and seriousness of the disease or health problem.
- 2) Motivated by the desire to change eating habits and customs, and associated to the multiple and spontaneous appeal in favor of a more ecological society.

These paths are identified as social phenomena - products of cultural change. They indicate that the conversion to eating habits from ecologically-based agricultural products occurred due to the adoption of a new awareness related to health issues, eating habits and environmental concerns in general. The interviewed people emphasize the ecological importance of the products they consume.

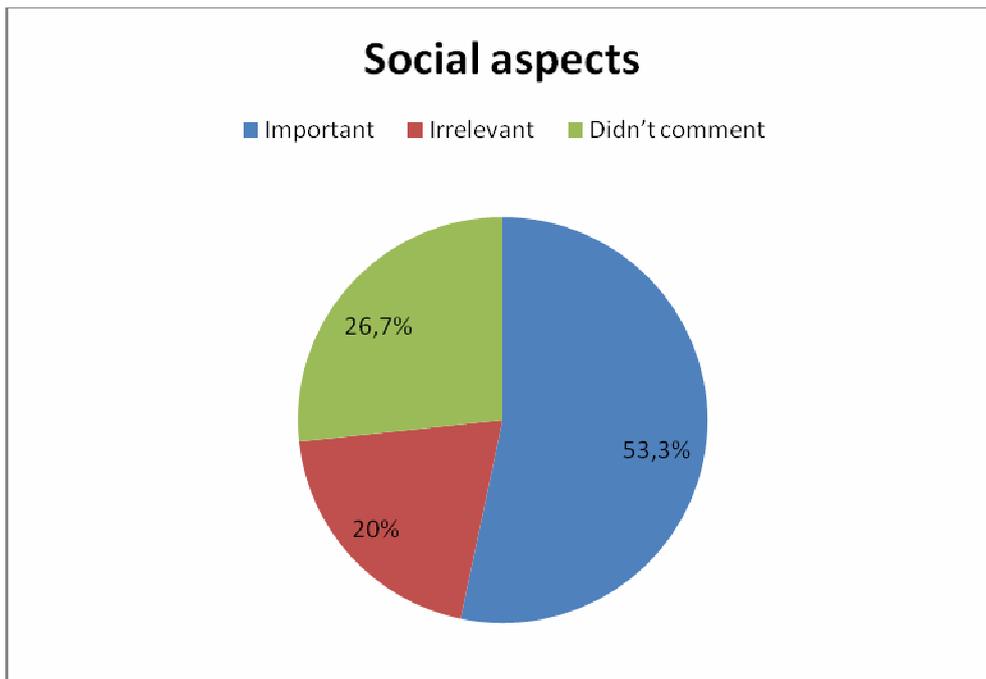
As of this, it is clear that “Eco Culture” creates cultural patterns that put pressure on the consumer society’s economic necessities. Better put, such necessities are influenced by the cultural relationships with the environment. Therefore, the first evaluation confirms one of the hypotheses of the research.

Local Organic Products



In general, the consumption paths expose the style of the consumer of organic products. The profile of these consumers is marked by how regularly they consume these products. Data from the interviews indicate that 80% of shoppers from Campinas consume organic products on a regular basis. This being, only 20% are occasional consumers. This illustrates that shoppers have a very settled and embedded preference pattern. Moreover, many consumers associate local organic products to high quality consumption.

Local Organic Products

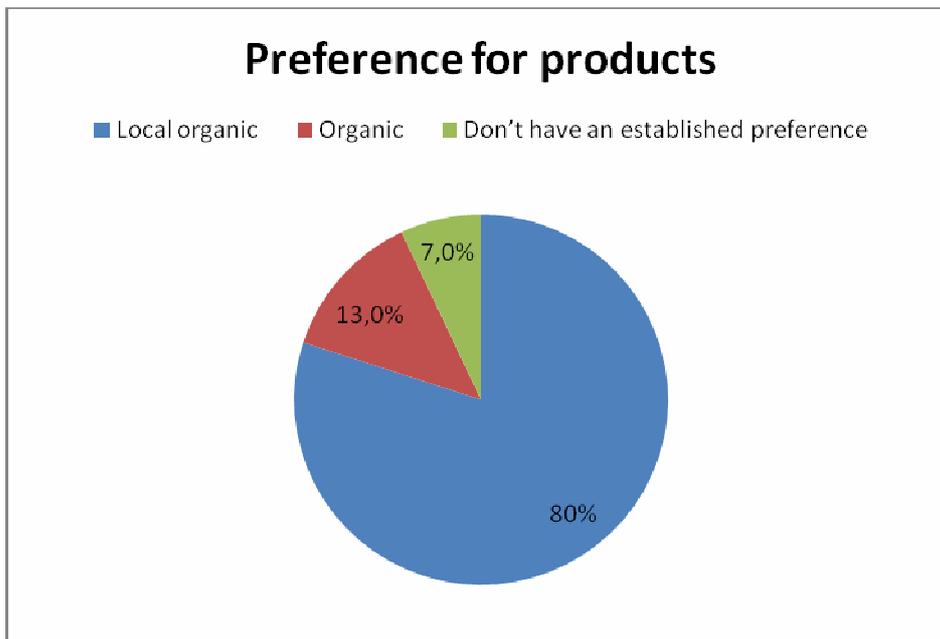


With regard to social aspects of the consumption of organic food, 53.3% of the interviewed people consider the established social alliances between producers and consumers to be very important. Some consumers attribute trust and reliability in the products to that relationship.

Others consider fairs to be a moment for socializing with producers, making it clear that there are components that surpass the sell-buy detachment. Some consumers say they enjoy visiting farmers and growers, and consider the permanency of family producers in rural establishments to be important. Therefore, for 20% of the interviewees, social relations are not considered at the moment of purchase. Apart from that, 26.7% of consumers didn't comment on the social aspects of organic product consumption.

Mapping on imported organic consumption

Imported Organic Products

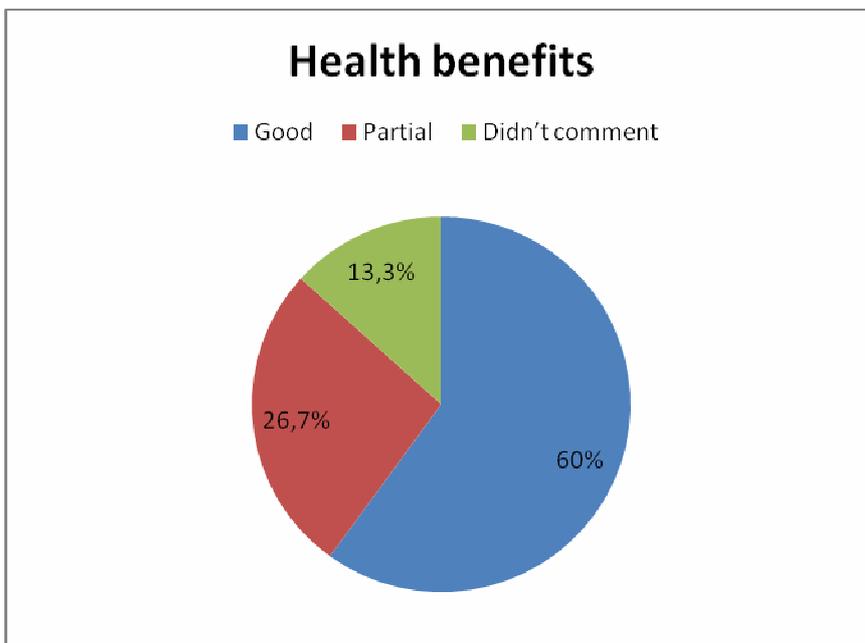


The interviews show that 80% of consumers prefer local organic products. Apart from this 13.3% consume local organic products as well as imported ones. Roughly six and a half percent (6.7%) of interviewed people don't have an established preference for products. As of this it is made clear that in overall, consumers from Campinas prefer local organic products because they associate such products to certain criteria, related to reliability and guaranteed quality, since they pay visits to local production units and establish direct relationships with the producers.

Imported Organic Products



Imported Organic Products

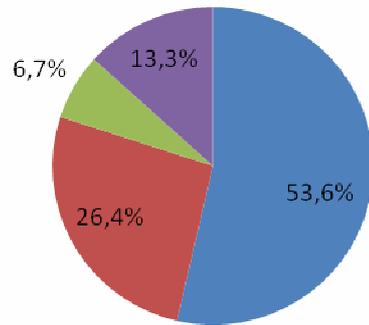


Concerning prices, 93.3% consider imported organic products to be expensive. Sixty percent of the interviewed people consider imported organics to be good for their health and 26.7% judge that such products may present partial health benefits, but question the production and transportation conditions of other regions. For this group of consumers production from abroad does not bring about reliability or trust - the transport process promotes the product's loss of quality.

Imported Organic Products

Relationship of organic products with the environment

■ Good ■ Partial ■ Bad ■ Didn't comment

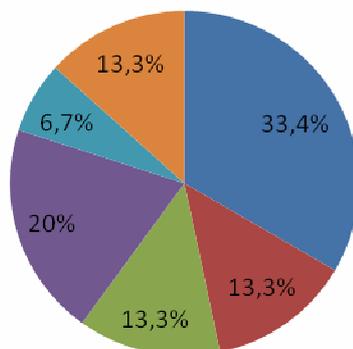


The environmental issues on imported organic food present a favorable scenario. Of the interviewed consumers, 53.6% state that imported organic products are good for the environment, 26.4% consider the benefits for the environment to be partial, and another 6.7% of the interviewed people believe that imported organic products have a negative effect on the environment, since producers would rather supply for the global demand on foodstuffs and are once more indirectly put into the aforementioned issues of production and transportation.

Imported Organic Products

Transportation problems

■ Quality ■ Conservation ■ Environment
■ Price-Quality ■ No Information ■ Didn't comment



Another important element to analyze in order to understand the view of consumers of organic products is the food mileage issue (Food Miles). In this context 33.4% of the interviewed people think that long-distance transportation affects the quality of organic products and 13.3% of those consumers believe that the distance involved causes problems to the preservation of food products.

The environmental problems from the transportation process of organic products were mentioned by 13.3% of queried consumers. The most mentioned problem concerns the large scale use of non-renewable fuel and the loss of energy involved. To conclude this interpretation, 20% attribute the problems related to price-quality to transportation and 6.7% are not aware of the transportation problems of foodstuffs.

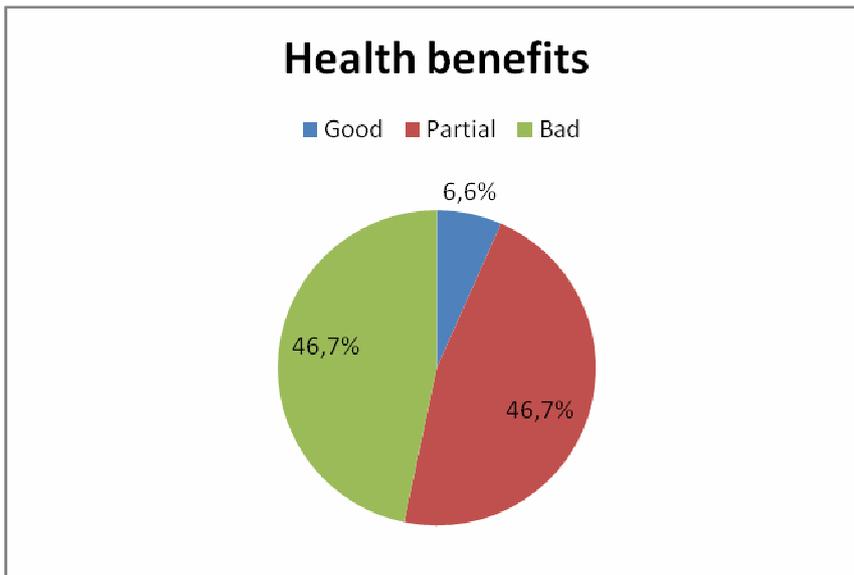
Mapping on local conventional consumption

Local Conventional Products



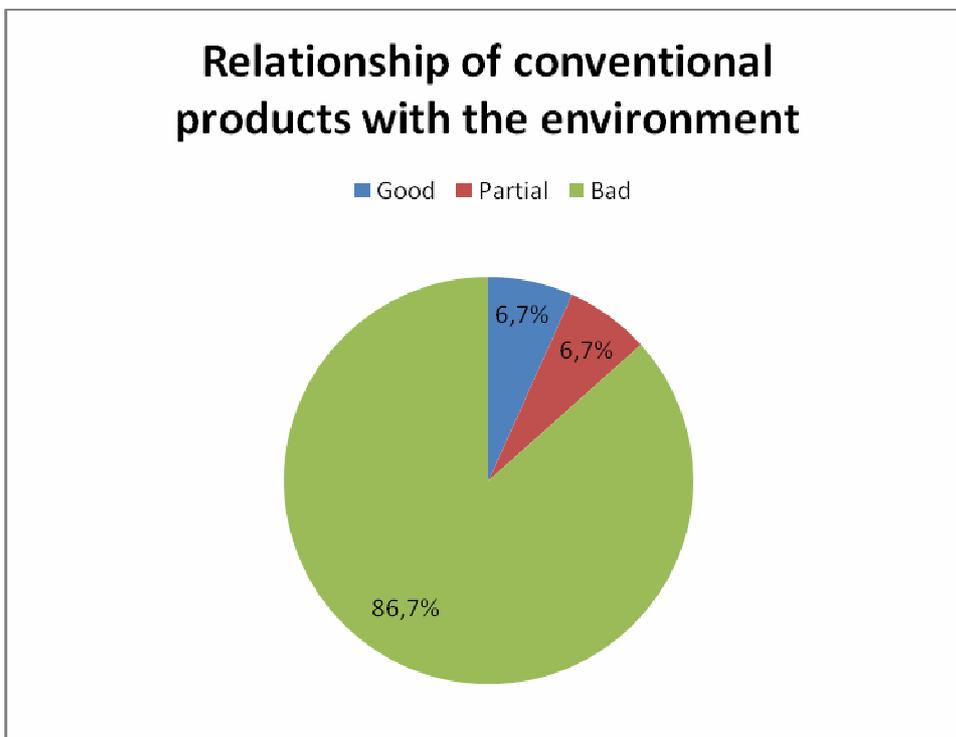
The above graph illustrates the awareness in consumers of organic products in comparison to non-organic products. The collected data shows that 46.7% of consumers consider the prices of conventional products to be reasonable. Forty percent consider prices to be low while 13.3% believe that these prices are high. In the overall picture, the greater share of urban consumers of organic products from Campinas considers that conventional products have low or average prices.

Local Conventional Products



Regarding health issues, 46.7% think that local conventional products are hindering to health. Another 46.7% consider that such products offer partial benefits to health. Only 6.6% of interviewed individuals think that local conventional products are good for health. Therefore, in the consumer's viewpoint, it is clear that local conventional products are reasonably accepted by one group and not accepted by another.

Local Conventional Products



Local conventional products don't have a very high environmental grading. Of the total number of consumers in Campinas, 86.7% of them consider the products to be bad for the environment. Only 6.7% think that local conventional products are beneficial to the environment and another 6.7% believe that the environmental benefits are partial.

Result Findings 2

2. Research with consumers of organic products in retailers and supermarkets.⁹

These interviews were carried out in Carrefour and Pão-de- Açúcar. The charted data helps to create an overall scenario on the profile of consumers of organic production from the region that is being highlighted. With such information it is possible to map the preference pattern and the various viewpoints of the interviewed consumers.

Content of the research questions

This methodology is based on the act of performing open interviews. Fifteen consumers who buy ecologically-based products in retailers and supermarkets in Campinas (SP) were interviewed. The interviewed individuals were encouraged to compare local organic products, imported organics and conventional products.

- 6) Respond to questions related to their consumption attitudes.
- 7) Describe the individual that purchases and consumes each type of product.
- 8) Describe the individual that never purchases or consumes each type of product.
- 9) React to a discussion between three fictitious consumers.
- 10) Provide an opinion on the issues of the (Food Miles) transportation process, distribution method, and producers.

Presenting the interviews

Fifteen interviews were carried out in Campinas (SP-Brazil). Among the interviewees, 13 are women and 2 are men. Five of the interviewed consumers are occasional and 10 are frequent, regular consumers. All of the interviewed individuals are Brazilian and fit in the age chart below.

<30	3
31-40	0
41-50	3

51-60	4
>60	5

Table 1: Age range

Main Results

Discussion between three hypothetical people

This part of the interview consists of imagining a discussion between three individuals who have different viewpoints. These people attribute different values and importance to health issues, small producers, the environment, and to distribution.

- 1) The first person chooses organic products to ensure the health of the family, motivate small-sized producers, and also for environmental reasons.
- 2) The second person focuses his/her choice on local and domestic organic products and does not buy products in retail stores and supermarkets.
- 3) The third person attributes great value to local production, price of the products; this person also buys local conventional products.

The figure below illustrates the difference of opinions – agreement or disagreement with each fictitious person.

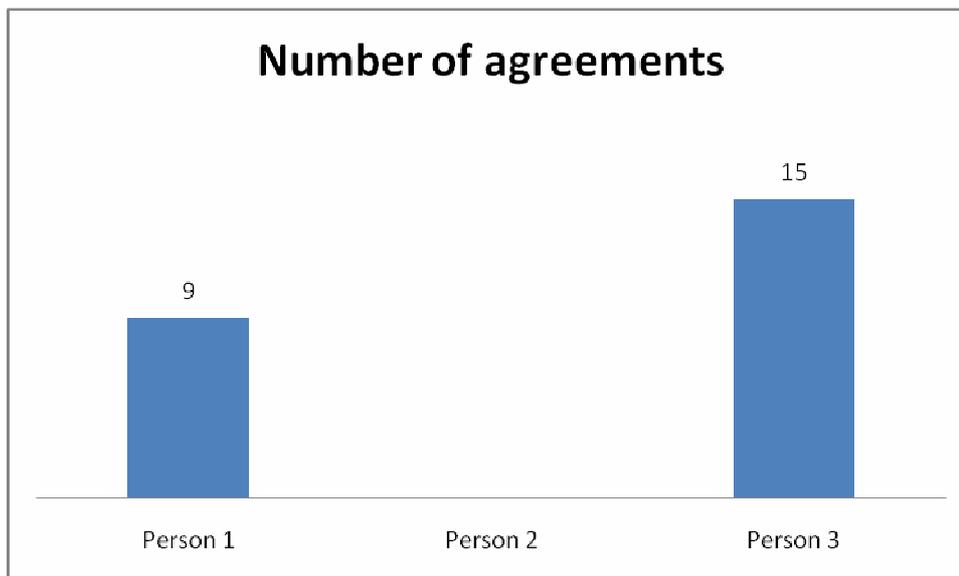


Figure 2: Number of agreements.

The graph shows that none of the interviewed individuals agree with person 2 (who concentrated his/her choices in local or national ecological production and does not purchase products in retailers and supermarkets).

Person 1	Agree	Disagree
I buy organic products because they are good for my health and the health of my family	15	0
I buy organic products because they are good for the environment	7	8
I buy organic products in order to help small-sized producers	9	6
Organic products are good regardless of where they come from	0	15
Organic products are all the same, no matter where you buy them	3	12

Person 2	Agree	Disagree
I pay attention to the origin of organic products	10	5
Organic products must be locally produced	15	0
Organic products shouldn't be sold in supermarkets and retailers	2	13
Organic products found in supermarkets and retailers are not good	2	13
Organic products in supermarkets and retailers don't help small-sized producers	9	6

Person 3	Agree	Disagree
I prefer a conventional local product to an imported organic product	12	3
I prefer a local product due to the pollution during the process of transportation of other products	0	
I prefer a local conventional product to an imported organic product due to the reduced price	8	7
There are organic products that are not produced by small-sized producers	4	11

If I want to help small-sized producers in this country it's better to buy local conventional products than buying organic products	5	10
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Comparison between local, imported, and conventional products

The interviewed people were encouraged to grade three types of products based on four criteria:

- D) Desire to purchase 0 = none, 10 = strong
- E) Environment 0 = bad for, 10 = good for the environment
- F) Price 0 = cheap, 10 expensive

Grading average

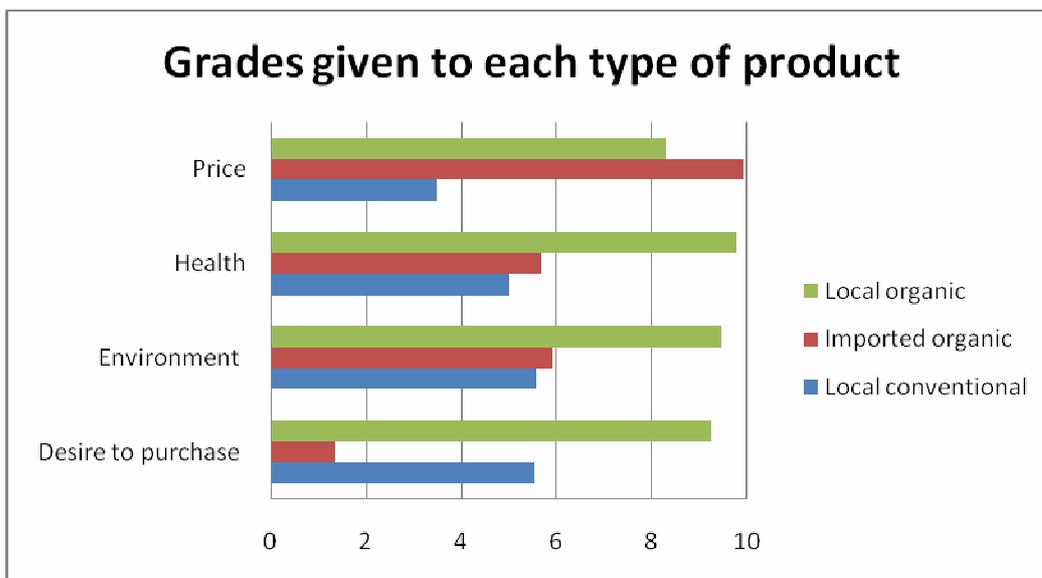


Figure 3: Grading average

The above graph makes it clear that local conventional products are the most inexpensive of all. Local organic products are considered to be the best for your health and to the environment. The desire to purchase is much stronger for local organic products.

Local organic products

The analysis of the interviews shows that 73% of the interviewed people consider the prices of local organic products to be high. Roughly 100% of the interviewed

individuals believe that such products are good for health and the environment because they are free of pesticides.

Some comments presented the idea that organic cultivation brings about positive impacts to the environment. Apart from this, 60% of the interviewed people consider the social aspect of consumption, since they defend the social importance of local organic producers.

Imported organic products

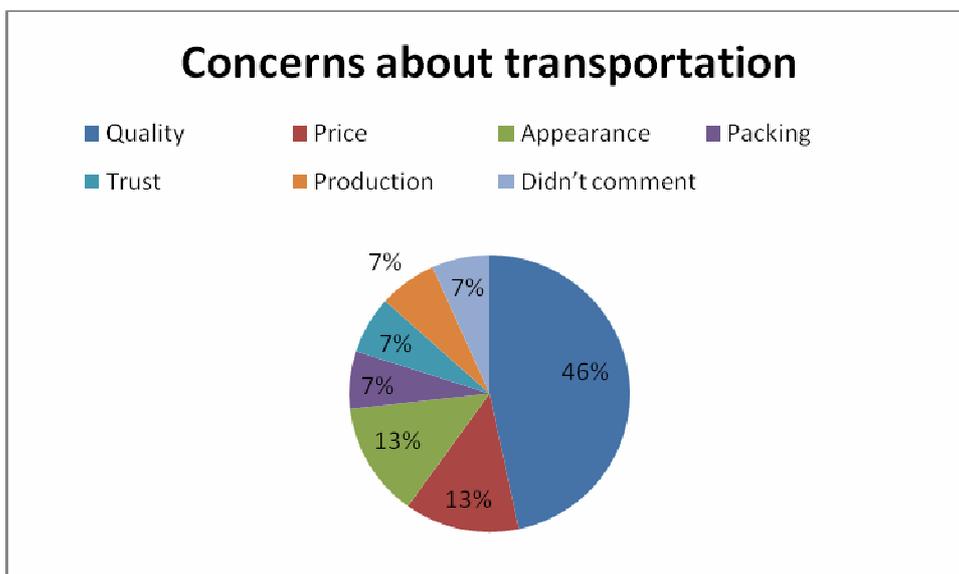
From the series of interviews that were carried out, a 40% figure shows that consumers associate imported products with partial benefits to the environment. Twenty seven percent consider imported organic products bad for health. Forty percent believe that organic products maintain a good relationship with the environment. All interviewed people consider prices of these products too high.

Local conventional products

Within the research realm, 47% of the interviewed people consider prices of conventional products to be average. These people consider such products to have partial benefits to health and to the environment. Practically all interviewed consumers of organic products also purchase conventional products because they do not always find the products they need that have an ecological production process.

Conceptions on transport process and distribution channels

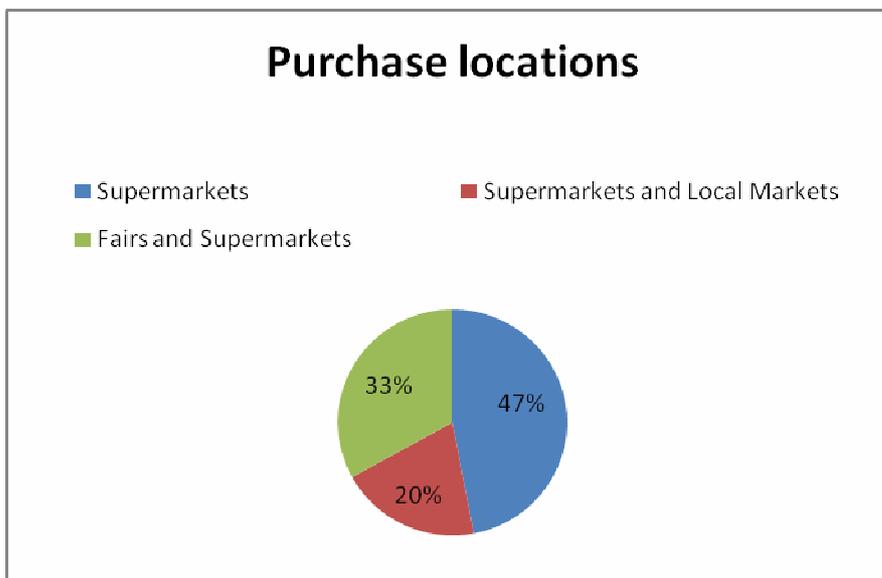
Transport (Food Miles)



The transportation process of products for long distances is not a positive point for the interviewed people. They do not trust the production method for these products and the preservation of quality of foodstuffs. Moreover, there is a criterion for reliability in local production that seems to be of crucial value, since such feelings of trust and reliability are already embedded into the eating and purchasing habits of consumers.

Distribution channels

The interviewed individuals were asked where they purchase organic products. The graph below represents the responses that were obtained.



Among the group of interviewed people 47% would rather buy at a retailer or supermarket, 33% buy products in fairs and smaller supermarkets and 20% buy in supermarkets and small secondary shops, however, they do not buy in open fairs. The market for organic products is consistently growing in Brazil, and due to this, new distribution channels are sprouting. Therefore some of the interviewed consumers purchase in alternative distribution channels such as open fairs and local markets; but the greatest distribution channels are retail chains and supermarkets.

Comparison between products

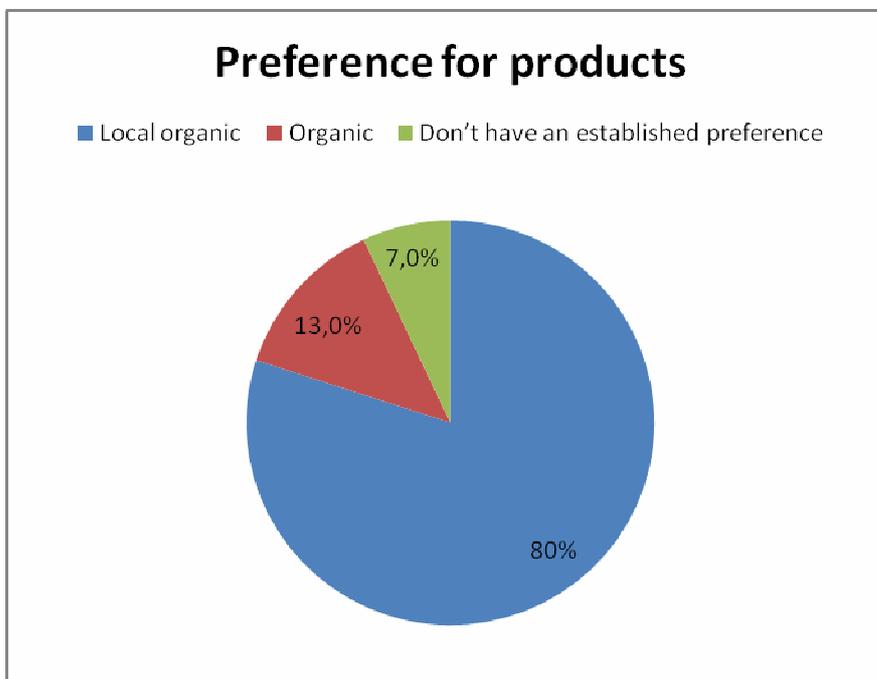
The interviewed people were encouraged to talk spontaneously about local and imported organic products and also about conventional products.

Local conventional products

Consumers do buy conventional products, but regularly complain about the excessive use of pesticides. The interviewees consider conventional products not so good for health. Many buyers consume such products regularly because the price, amount of supply and variety of organic products is still not equivalent to conventional ones. As of this, none of the interviewed people solely consume organic products; conventional products add up to provide a strong complement.

Imported organic products

Most of the interviewed people do not consume imported products. The preferred option is for local organic products.



The interviewees are not accustomed to consuming imported organic products; many say that this behavior isn't part of their buying habits. Many state that Brazilian

consumers don't have the need to buy imported products because there is a large and varied national production.

Local organic products

These products are associated (by the interviewees) to quality of life, good health and a good interaction with the environment. A great number of the interviewed people believe that the lack of pesticides in the products is the determining factor for quality. Such products have the highest rate of acceptance with consumers. On the consumer values scale, these products are the leaders when it comes to the consumer choice.

Findings 3.

The Commercialization of Organic Products.

1. Opinion of sales managers from the largest retail and supermarket chains in Campinas.

In order to widen the initial scope of the research with consumers and to further understand the phenomenon of organic product commercialization in Campinas, interviews were carried out with sales managers from Pão de Açúcar and Carrefour following the guidelines below:

- 1) Influence of governmental policies on the sector
- 2) Marketing strategies
- 3) Sales
- 4) Product diversity
- 5) Supermarket paths and records concerning organic product sales
- 6) The sector's perspective
- 7) Origin of the products
- 8) Market scenarios

9) Data: internal surveys

According to the manager of the sales department at Carrefour Dom Pedro, there is no influence from government policies in the organic product sector; in such a way that all the initiatives related to promoting and selling these products come from the store itself. Moreover, he states that Carrefour has created its own product line with a personalized brand name and a guarantee for quality.

The marketing strategies for this sector were also emphasized by the manager as an important acting point of Carrefour, which invests in this sector because it believes that there is a growing trend toward the organic product market. Carrefour Dom Pedro started working on these products approximately five years ago; at first sales were slow and the amount and variety was small. Nowadays there is considerable product diversity that is mostly due to the ever growing demand, according to the manager. This diversity can be observed by the quantity of brands, types and origins of products exposed on the gondola shelves.

The sales manager at Carrefour Dom Pedro concludes by saying that internal market research exposes the fact that there is a trend toward growth in this sector and that expectation for the market's future scenario is very promising. He believes that this sector is a reference for the aforementioned food product consumption trend.

At Carrefour Iguatemi, the sales manager's opinion is not so different. He states that there is a lack of government incentives such as tax reduction policies for the sector. In the last 7 years Carrefour Iguatemi has commercialized organic products, and has been adopting and implementing a strategy for further diversity of products; he also states that perspectives for the sector are good. However, the manager points out that there is a lack of information and promoting on behalf of the media. Many consumers are not aware of these products and this hinders consumption.

The sales manager at Pão de Açúcar Barão Geraldo also comments that there is no government aid. Pão de Açúcar is mostly focused on marketing strategies; the manager says there is a "Green Store" in Indaiatuba (SP), belonging to the Pão de Açúcar supermarket chain. This store follows a standard of sustainability concerning functioning and design. This means a launch of a new line of supermarkets, currently undergoing tests to evaluate the functioning of the adopted alternative system.

The manager of the Ecological Store (Green Store) from Pão de Açúcar in Indaiatuba (SP) commented that this store is a pioneering initiative in the sector and in the whole country. The store opened its doors three months ago and prioritizes the

selling of locally-produced organic products. The manager points out that there are government initiatives to aid small-size producers but these are insufficient to stimulate local ecological production.

In this manager's point of view the market of organic products is a "growing non-reverting trend". To him, one of the characteristics of the sector is the presence of "faithful customers", moreover, he affirms that the expectation based on planning from Pão de Açúcar is for there to be a price reduction in the short term. He states that the Pão de Açúcar supermarket chain is currently being able to promote such reductions, attempting for market expansion. Pão de Açúcar has been working with these products for 8 years; in the start the amount and quantity was reduced but in the last 2 years there has been a substantial growth in demand. With this growth Pão de Açúcar has intensified its sales strategy, promoting a wide variety of products from many origins and a considerable large line of imported products.

Pão de Açúcar has great perspectives for the organic product sector; the manager considers the current and future market scenarios as a strategic point for the company. Moreover, he notes that this is the current trend of supermarket and retail chains; Pão de Açúcar strives to have an important role in this trend through sales and marketing strategies. Pão de Açúcar can offer roughly 90% of fruit, vegetables and greens from ecological sources.

Market consolidation for supermarkets of organic products in the state of São Paulo.

According to the point of view of a specialist in the sector, in the end of the 1990s the scenario for organic products suffered transformation and widened the selling and production channels. It was then that the global market of organic products started to develop, as the largest demand originated mainly due to the European consumption market. In that same time the term 'organic product' was already consolidated in the state of São Paulo. This was when the IFOAM was created, that put in place the discussion about the need to standardize production; consequently initiating the process of certification. The ABRAS (stands for Brazilian Supermarket Association), other supermarket chains and companies that conduct market research started devising studies on the profile and trends of consumption. In the analyses, it was clear that in the near

future there would be a potential market for organic production. As of this, in the second half of the 1990s, the volume of organic products in supermarkets and retailers was increased and has grown substantially.

Agriculture and Livestock agents from the Ministério da Agricultura (ministry of agriculture) in Brazil proposed the creation of legislation for organic food products. The federal project for the establishment of such legislation had been under discussion from 1998 to 2007, when legislation for organic products was embedded. However, for this specialist, the public institutions still don't master the subject, leaving it to the market to decide.

Supermarket logistics and planning

Horticulture and organic fruit are perishable, having a random offer and distribution system. These production characteristics drive away the interest from retailers. The interviewed businessmen point out that it is easier to sell organic cereal and power bars than organic perishables due to the irregular offer. But there is a strategy for purchasing products; supermarkets and retailers purchase in a centralized manner. There are sales managers who negotiate directly with distributors, always seeking contracts of quality, quantity and regularity. In the case of green, leafy vegetables that are cultivated in the large production belts of metropolitan cities in the state (São Paulo and Campinas for example), there will very rarely be a large scale removal of conventional products in the short term, since there is a lack of planning and investment in the production sector, which depends on family producers in these locations. These small producers are in general unable to organize and integrate politically, therefore becoming unattractive to the State.

According to the interviewed individual, organic products are nowadays analyzed as a productive chain. He also says it is necessary to invest in agro research; however in Brazil's institutional practices the available financial resources for investments are reduced when compared to other research programs. It is necessary to invest in science and technology when it comes to organic production. Furthermore there should be more measures to aid producers who are in process of transition or conversion.

He points out that the productive sector is also lacking practical interest and investments in organic production, since the State doesn't disclose sufficient funds to promote new dynamics in the economy. The State, through the intervention of public policies, currently acts as a regulator of the sector. Currently the State is not active in the productive realm in a crucial way. Therefore, what is needed is to have investment groups that seek to support and aid the production of organic products.

¹⁰The discussion on the market was presented in the paper (Abreu & Kledal & Pettan & Rabelo & Mendes (2008). The aspects associated to the public policies on the upkeep of agroecology production and the institutional apparatus for certification will be the subject of the next text.

Brazil in the global market of imports and exports¹⁰

In Brazil one cannot discuss market without mentioning the preponderant role of certification processes for organic products till date; which are performed in an encompassing manner by private companies that provide certification services. In the meantime a certification method emerges, that works through a system of perspective guarantees which is recognized by the legislation of organic products as of late 2007. The Brazilian legislation on organic products, under this denomination, recognizes a range of products derived from diverse agricultural styles, and seeks (among other objectives) to establish rules for the working practices of these certifiers. Brazilian legislation for organic products reflects social development and is the result of the communal construction from different economic and social elements in the sector. It is based on an original law, recognizing the system of guarantees with social control (participative) and discipline; guiding the creation of regulation for the production and commercialization of organic products. Such legislation in use will bring about advantages in terms of national and global markets because it will stimulate and reinforce a feeling of trust in consumers.

According to specialists in the sector, this is not enough, because neither the government nor the certifiers are producers. The producer is the agriculturer. Regardless of developments in some sectors such as sugar, coffee, meat, etc. technologies for

ecological production are insufficient and technical support in most cases is private. This situation adds up to the factor that the agriculturer doesn't have an offer of agroecological input available and of easy access in order to spark transition.

One must emphasize that in the specific case of agricultural research, the production of scientific knowledge on ecologically-based agriculture started being institutionally highlighted as a national challenge and priority in late 2006. Currently, priority is on the integration of scientific methods of agroecology in research projects and programs.

In this way, also keeping the precarious structure of production in mind, one can understand the difficulties from producers to respond to and provide for the varied and alternative demands of large metropolitan areas.

Demand for certified products is greatly determined by developed countries. Brazil, even with a precarious production structure, has made an effort to supply for that demand; exporting 70% of total certified production (coffee, sugar, tropical fruit, cocoa, meat, etc). The global organic food chain demands quality, quantity and regularity. Therefore, there is potential market for Brazil to tap into; however, Brazilian conditions for aiding and supporting production are in deficit.

General aspects of the empirical study on the organic consumption in fairs and supermarkets in the area of Campinas (SP).

In this research, 30 people were interviewed. This program investigated consumer's eating habits in relation to local ecological products (LEP), imported ecological products (IEP) and local conventional products (LCP), apart from showing the motivations for consumption and social commitment of consumers.

Brazilian consumers have preference for LEP, and between IEP and LCP they would rather the latter; showing preference for local products and rejection to imported ones. This is mostly due to the negative effects that high mileage has on products, and the fact that this (high mileage) is not necessary now that Brazil produces all green leafy vegetables and fruit that are consumed.

It is also important to emphasize that consumers who purchase organic products in fairs reject shopping in supermarkets because they opt for a short process or direct sales process; in other words, a process where there is direct contact with producers

and/or representatives. They also claim that product quality in supermarkets is inferior and prices are higher.

The increase in production of organic products in Brazil has made agriculturers look for more diverse selling points and locations for their harvests; offering their products in supermarkets, natural product stores, and exportation (Kledal, 2003). Most interviewed individuals said they consider this type of product as essential, and are willing to pay a higher price for these products in comparison to conventional ones. It was clear that the difference in eating habits in consumers of organic products mainly occurs because of the organic product itself, in relation to the conventional product, making personal and family health the main factor for consuming; another factor being product quality.

Discussion around the specialized bibliography

i) Culture, eating consumption and ecology.

There is little research on eating consumption that explains the eating patterns as being a reflex from socioeconomic and ecological changes that are merged in society, and that concomitantly deals with the multi-cause and bio-cultural nature of human feeding.

“The behavior related to food is directly connected to the sense of who we are and to our social identity, and this seems to be true for all humans. We react to other people’s eating habits, whoever it may be, and in return they react to our habits...., what we learn about food is inserted in a substantial body of cultural materials that are a product of history. Food and eating take up an essential position in social learning and development due to its vital and essential nature, however regular it may be. Behavior related to food repeatedly reveals the culture to which each one is inserted in” (MINTZ, 2001:1)

For each individual, eating represents a base that links the realm of ‘stuff’ to the realm of ideas through our acts. Thus, it is also a base that helps us relate to reality. The act of feeding is linked to the cultural elements of a certain people, and this ends up confirming some degree of identity.

The individual's eating takes up a symbolic dimension, and this is not only functional, making it important to understand the culture as well as the values and beliefs that permeate the relationship between the individual and the food itself.

Anthropological work has shown the diversity in the methods of producing, processing and consuming foodstuffs; these are not lonesome actions but constitute social activities and the way that societies elaborate representations of themselves, defining their identity in relation to other societies through their culinary habits and customs. (MINTZ, 2001; MURIETA, 2008, LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1964).

For Fredric Jameson (1991), we are experiencing a new expanded stage of the capitalist world; new changes in everyday life and in the culture promote the merging of the cultural and the economic, sparking a new form of dynamics. Thus, cultural phenomena must be dealt with in the terms of the abounding political economy.

Culture cannot be treated as a relatively autonomous expression of the social organization, and it must be clear that the development of global and local society is strongly influenced by new values and necessities. In Brazil's case there was an emergence of the environmental movement in the 70s (Abreu, 2005). Thus, comprehending the cultural dynamics of each socio-economic specific consumption process can be one of the most important clues in order to better understand the current scenario.

The social and political context from the 70s and 80s was marked by the appearance of a new environmental awareness based on what can be called "Ecological Culture"; a result of the new ways of giving value to the environment. This environmental culture organizes a selection process of economical practices of a society, pointing to a need for clarification to the influence of these cultural values in the economic realm. This process is shown with the emergence of a market of ecological products, in which the expansion of new eating habits is associated to a logical culture which is present in the new local contexts, particularly in great metropolitan areas.

Leff (2001) points out that the values of the new environmental awareness promote a re-signification of the actual world, in such a way that a radical criticism of necessities is stimulated. In other words, the environmental values show the failure from the productive system to satisfy the new demands from customers. The consumption of ecological products consists of exactly this process of re-signification, which reorients

consumers and promotes innovation from these demands. Thus, there is a cultural context in which new demands and new consumption styles emerge; these are associated to the values of the growing environmental awareness.

The economic organization emerges as a culture in that the economy is not a private sector that seeks resource production because this production is pre-economic. Therefore, the economy presents itself as a cultural intermediate for the social-ecological relationship therein (MORIN, 2000).

Studies that go deep into the aspects of rules and etiquette of consumption were carried out by anthropologists and social scientists (GOFTON, 1986; SANTOS, 2005). The act of feeding is not an object of interest from recent anthropology, as shown by Mintz (2001). Ethnographic studies on the way of life of specific populations that described their eating habits have already been performed by classic authors in this area, such as Evans-Pritchard (2002). Dealt with under another domain, eating is also mentioned in the work of Lévi-Strauss (2004) as this author perceives in the practical ways of preparing food – eating it raw, roasted, boiled or smoked – the symbolism that expresses the inner structure of societies.

Currently in our society, we must note that the act of feeding is not simply to eat. According to Carneiro (2003), “biological hunger is discerned from appetites; expressions of the varied human desires which satisfaction doesn’t only follow the short path from plate to mouth. This materializes as habits, customs, rituals and etiquette. [...] What is eaten is just as important as when it is eaten, where it is eaten and with whom it is eaten.”

Moreover, this subject has been instigating debates in contemporary anthropology, and can be seen in the works of Collaço (2003) in a study on fast food restaurants, or even in the realm of sociology; recently, studies about the role of alternative consumption that is inserted within production and distribution systems that are based on direct relationships between producers and consumers coined AMAP (Association for the Maintenance of County-Peasant Agriculture), identified and studied by diverse authors in Europe (Lamine, C. 2008). IN the AMAP case, the research results show that apart from the concern towards the environment, the principle of solidarity is made clear among human groups from the field and from the city.

In this context, it is necessary to analyze the meaning of ecological food consumption, this means to understand the logic and social and cultural motivation that

is embedded in the intake of these food products. Research with consumers show that the reasons for this intake are associated to the search for better quality of life, highlighting two aspects: health and the environment. Many studies indicate that those people who are concerned about eating also worry about environmental quality (Instituto CEPA/SC. 2003), within this method it is verified to which extent the commitment toward the settling of family agriculturers in the field is given place. This last aspect was not studied much in specialized literature.

ii) Consumption, the environment and new social partakers

Featherstone (1995) argues that it is important to center the prominence of consumption culture and not just consider it a derived phenomenon of production. Consumption has many dimensions and is not just a practice from a series of choices of actions; purchase, use, and finally disposal. Contrary to this image, many authors point to the fact that consumption is a significant phenomenon and is essential to the agreement of contemporary society (PORTILHO, 2003).

According to Portilho (2003), it is with the definition of the environmental crisis as a lifestyle problem and with the surfacing of expressions such as “green consumption” and “sustainable consumption”, it is possible to confirm the onset of works that associate the analysis of consumer society to environmental study.

It is also believed that in a globalized world where political activity is subject to market regulation, the act of citizenship, which is the nucleus of social relations, cannot be detached from consumption; which brings us back to the perspective of participants of social networks. It is necessary to deconstruct concepts that judge consumer behavior as irrational and alienated; similarly, concepts that only envision citizens acting in function of rationality from ideological principles. In this way, the consumer can also be a critical social partaker.

In this context, individual actions motivated by an ethical concern for the environment are capable of transforming the environmental impact of consumption, emphasizing a relationship of equivalence amid conceptions of consumers and citizens.

Based on the awareness that current consumption patterns are the root of the environmental crisis, critics to consumerism have been considered as a contribution to

the founding of a sustainable society. As of this, consumption has converted into a scenario in which the culture is the primary reason for disputes and makeovers.

Today's consumer is different from consumers of other phases of modern society. This lifestyle, based on the capacity and the urge to consume reveals itself as a free choice, where consumers feel they are in command. Thus, this consumer society can be defined based not only on the differences in the way people satisfy their needs, but also in the different dreams, hopes and aspirations (PORTILHO, 2003).

Therefore, consumer society is not only related to the satisfying of needs but, in overall, the ways in which we visualize the world and our placing therein, measuring our progress in the course of our lives.

According to Bourdieu (1999), consumption is motivated by the necessity of social trooping to achieve distinction or recognized status. Thus, different forms and capital (symbolic, social, cultural and economic) and concepts of 'habitus', 'field' and 'class' for the author are essential to define the thesis of 'consumption production'. According to this scientific view, the individuals learn to consume through a belonging to a determined social class.

Douglas (1997) proposes that culture must be taken seriously as an axis of tastes and preferences and, through the comprehensive cultural theory, suggests an analysis of the connections among political options, preferences for certain goods, adopted lifestyle and the economic structure of a society. For this author, when an individual 'goes shopping', the choices he/she makes are related to previous choices, such referring to the type of marriage, if he/she has children or not, occupation, the neighborhood he/she lives in, political option and perception on the human-nature relationship.

According to Douglas (1997) it is necessary to reevaluate the idea that consumption is a manifestation of individual choices. The culture itself is the result of a myriad of individual choices, not primarily involving goods, but involving types of social relationships. In this way, the individual would chose the type of society in which he/she would like to live in.

We defend the thesis that the emergence of the idea of an organic consumption was only possible because of the compounding of three interrelated factors:

(a) the advent of the environmental movement starting in the 70s;

(b) the integration of the environmental issue from segments of the business sector associated to supermarkets and the distribution of foodstuffs starting in the 80s, emphasizing strategies and mechanisms of expansion in supermarkets, also innovative technologies in the crafting and agroindustrial sectors;

(c) the emergence in the 90s of concerns related to the environmental impacts of lifestyles and consumption;

(d) conscious consumption with social, ethical and contributing responsibility of the human being – enlarging the appeal to social issues (non slave work, banned practice of child labor, respecting the determinations of the ILO, etc...);

(e) the strengthening of alternative structures of local and regional distribution of goods, characterized by shorter circuits such as producer fairs and the home delivery of product baskets, etc.

In this context, simple day-to-day activities such as going shopping for considered basic needs or even luxury goods started to be seen as behaviors and choices that have an effect on the quality of the environment. Thus, the ‘consumer of organic products’ can also be defined as someone who, apart from the price/quality variable, also includes in his/her power of choice the environmental variable, giving preference to products that do not hinder the environment; many of them also have strong concerns over family producers.

According to Portilho (2003), the pressure brought out by consumers when seeking organic products and boycotting products that have a strong environmental impact would be the jumpstart that would stimulate entrepreneurial competitiveness, the development of ‘ecologically sensitive products’ and the use of clean technologies. However, there is a problem; the solution to environmental problems may not demand organic products, but an adaptation to a life without certain products.

Consumers are the privileged social partakers in society’s change toward sustainability, since they are not manipulated passive victims of the dominating forces of production; the field of consumption can be considered as an extension for new political practices.

According to Blee (1985), under certain conditions, consumption can become a polarized transition as it incorporates a consciousness toward relations to class, involved with relations to production, and promotes group initiatives in the public sphere.

iii) Theories to understand the sociocultural meaning of consumer behavior.

The economic theory which is vulgarly known as neoclassic; it also deals with the consumer's behavior and assumes that an individual's decisions related to consumption are based on the solutions to problems of maximizing his/her satisfaction, under the conditions of his/her budget restrictions. This means that the consumer seeks the best level of satisfaction possible through the consumption of a determined group of assets, respecting his/her monetary boundaries. In other words, the consumer strives for the best level of satisfaction (usefulness) permitted by budget restrictions. This increased satisfaction is measured according to the consumer's preferences.

The problem is that this theory doesn't integrate sociocultural aspects of consumer behavior. Specifically for organic products, other factors gain importance in the decision to purchase: taste, convenience, variety, quality and social importance, or environmental values and health concerns; however some factors are related to price.

More than just a practice or 'economical' interest, society holds meanings that are developed by all cultural orders. "For humans, there cannot be any interest or practical significance in consumption products, such as is characteristic in animals whose relationship with the object is precisely confined to things being the way they are". (SAHLINS, 2003 [1976]: 127)

According to Sahlins (2003[1976]), the practical reason consists of an undetermined explanation of economic needs, since it doesn't explain the cultural form of such needs. The 'utility' is not a quality of the object, but a meaning of the objective qualities. In this context, from which 'utility' is not a purely physical-natural concept, economical needs that are influenced by categories of 'utility' do not summarize to the material necessities of biological survival. Thus, the presence of cultural reason in the construction of economical needs for the social being is inherent because, just as eating habits, dress code or norms and other social customs, needs are influential and culturally organized.

Mary Douglas (1996) defends consumption as a system of signification that supplies symbolic necessities. In this way, assets are needed to materialize and stabilize

cultural categories. Therefore, the essential function of consumption is to simply make sense, building an intelligible environment.

In the studies of Douglas (1996), it is made clear that consumption is like a code, and through this code many of our social relationships are interpreted. This code, when interpreting relations, gives way for the classification of people and things, products and services, groups and individuals. As of this, the act of consuming is the act of working a system of classifying the world.

In this theoretic scenario, the consumption of organic products is a code that reflects new socioenvironmental relations, as it is inserted into a new cultural logic.

iv) Context of the organic product markets

According to Graziano da Silva (1998), the consumer has had an increasing importance in determining the 'rules of the game' in the agro-feeding sector's productive chain, which does not mean that the consumer has become sovereign in this process; the consumer has been 'adopted by retail'. This means that retail chains have adopted consumers as a mascot and have taken up the arsenal of consumer rights as a competitive strategy of the market, creating barriers to the entrance (and competition) of small businesses.

According to Vilela (1999), the 80s experienced the greatest change in social behavior in relation to the organization of agro-feeding systems in industrialized countries, as observed by Godman & Watts (1994). These changes in behavior include a significant growth in consumer's activism, with the constitution of new social movements oriented to confronting specific eating issues, questioning methods of intensive use of chemical inputs in agricultural production, chemical residue in food, synthetic additives, animal health issues, labeling food products, product safety and hygiene.

The development of the food product market has been characterized by substantial changes in the last years, expressing a strong diversity of social forms of ecologically-based production and systems of commercialization. In the context of relations of merchant exchanges it's possible to observe from traditional producer fairs that sell directly to consumers, specialty shops, delivery of home baskets to the sales in supermarkets in middle high class neighborhoods in metropolitan cities.

Conclusion

Self interest and environmental protection are compatible in a series of choices in consumption: organic products are seen as bringing personal well being (health), while protecting the environment and strengthening family producers. But the problem is that individual actions, motivated by an ethical concern for the environment, as the proposition of organic consumption implies, would only be able to transform consumption if these consumption values and conditions were widely evident in society. However, since environmental worries and concerns are not universal or even widely shared; and not everyone has the socioeconomical condition or access to this type of consumption, given that this range of food has a premium price to pay, this solution ends up focusing mostly on those who are really concerned with the environment, individual and family health and who coincidentally have the means to pay for this. In Brazil, social inequality is predominant, and this puts boundaries to the expansion of the consumption of organic products.

It is also possible to state that the great potential in expanding the consumption of organic food in the country should be improved and enlarged through official public campaigns on a national scale (MAPA) and through some States of the Federation; disclosing the varied favorable aspects of organic food, and simultaneously enabling the potential of direct sales (producer and consumer) of distinct locations in the sense of reducing the difference in prices between these products and conventional ones.

However this vast reality may weigh up; in the past years the development of the food market has been stimulated by large scale changes in consumption habits in such a substantial way that it's possible to observe the growth in sales of organic food products in the country. The preferred eating behavior of important sectors of Brazilian consumers seems to be headed in the direction of a greater demand for organic products, despite the fact that prices are for the great part of the population (as highlighted earlier in this paper) not very welcoming. Consumers consider this type of product indispensable, showing that they are willing to pay a higher price when compared to a conventional product. This is mostly seen by the amount of organic product gondolas that are present in the large supermarket and retail chains that were researched. Such observations, as they are, focus on the socio-cultural importance of this type of eating habit.

Environmental issues that are related to ecological risks, hygiene, eating safety and social aspects have improved demand for these products. The increase in production

and distribution is linked to the power of choice from consumers. Consumers of organic products are the main partakers in sustainability; it's a proportional choice and political reflex that can have a power to pressure directly on the market or guiding changes and alterations in production.

The research showed that open fairs are the preferred commercializing channels of the interviewed consumers, but supermarkets have a very important role due to the distribution pattern of organic food in Campinas, that is characterized by having a wider geographical network for supplying consumers than that of fairs. Fairs are numerically smaller and take place in middle-high class neighborhoods. However, the spam is not as encompassing in terms of geographical distribution of organic food. In terms of production volume, supermarkets are also responsible for the larger distribution, while fairs have a significantly smaller piece of the distribution chain.

Summarizing, in relation to the conversion process of eating, following are some of the elements that substantiate the adhesion to the consumption of organics in supermarkets, retailers and fairs of Campinas (SP):

1) Experience with constant health problems to the individual or to the family can build up a risk awareness in consumers that leads to a critical position related to eating, this leading to a break with the previous consumption system. This type of admission can interpret differences in the constant experience of health problems. The conversion process can be faster or slower, and is directly related to the intensity and seriousness of the health problem. What this does is promote the emergence of new habits (practices) and a different vision toward the importance and value of food products to our health. Living with constant health problems determines individual consumption strategies that seek the improvement of quality of life. The profile of these consumers is tagged by the high consumption frequency and by the consolidated and defined preference pattern.

2) Global and local cultural pressure in favor of a more ecological and socially-fair society motivates changes in habits and eating customs, and consumer's choices can be reoriented toward the consumption of healthy food products as well as the interest in social issues.

In conclusion, the transformation to another form of eating is given by multiple human values that are acquired from a new awareness related to health, eating, social and environmental concerns. Therefore, it is clear that an 'Ecological Culture' creates cultural patterns that pressure consumer's economic needs in a society; better put, such necessities are influenced by the relationship with the environment. The created hypothesis has been confirmed, once a new local and global socio-environmental culture creates dynamics for the studied trading systems, with a stronger or weaker gradient of values related to human health, respect for nature, the future of the planet and concerns with the survival of family producers; expressing traditional farmer-peasant aspects and ecological modernism. This being, some traditional values are being redeveloped and reaffirmed.

As of this, there must be an up-keep to this research subject for a larger scope of the researched spectrum, and for the development of theoretical and conceptual structures that are capable of revealing this complex social phenomenon which is on course. Also, special studies related to the anthropological and social aspects that, due to the short research timeline, didn't make it possible to illuminate the phenomenon further. This suggests the need for continued research so that we can further our understanding of consumer practices, preferences and visions.

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