Are shoppers aware of Organic Certification logos?

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The introduction on the 1st July of the new mandatory EU logo for organic food and farming presents a new challenge for the various existing organic certification schemes in Europe.

The new European Organic logo.

Details of the logo and its use can be found on http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic/eu-policy/logo_en. A very helpful guidance note has been produced by OF&G and can be found on their website www.organicfarmers.org.uk.

In this article we explore consumer awareness and perception of different certification schemes and corresponding logos in the UK, based on a survey with more than 400 consumers in three supermarkets and one organic shop. The work is part of the Certcost project*, funded by the European Seventh Framework Programme.

The survey covered the old EU organic logo, two private logos (Soil Association and Organic Farmers and Growers) and products labelled just with the word organic. This choice was based on a preliminary survey of the presence of logos on 10 product categories in UK shops in November 2008, in which across all categories more than 50% of products carried the SA logo, but only about 10% carried the logo of another control body and only about 4% carried the EU logo. In six categories (e.g. fresh produce) between 30% and 50% of products did not carry any certification logo (Janssen and Hamm, 2008).

Consumers had to fill in a short questionnaire that examined their perception and expectations of organic standards and logos. This article contains a short summary of the attitude statements towards the different UK logos and a European logo.

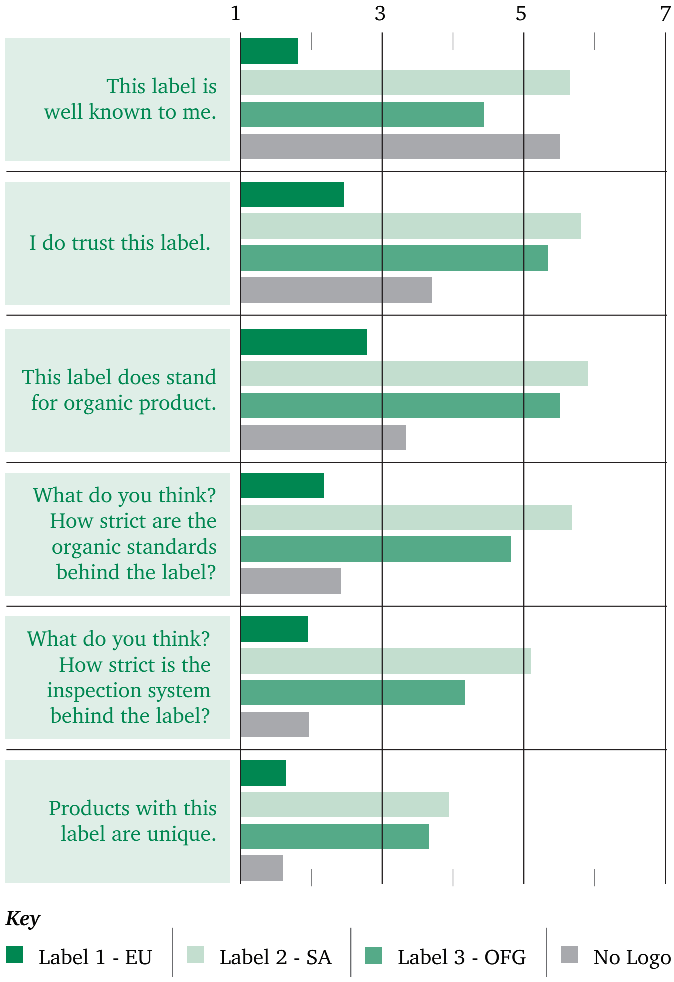
In the study, only consumers who stated that they bought organic eggs and apples at least once per month could participate. 70% of them were female, reflecting the distribution of main food shoppers in the population (Davies, 2006) and we recruited an equal share of the two age groups: 18 to 44 and 45 to 70 years old.

Results

Participants were asked to rank each logo on a scale of 1 to 7 for a number of questions (see Figure 1).

The results show some difference in relation to the certification logos (see Figure 1). In relation to most questions the Soil Association received the highest ratings, mostly followed by the OF&G logo.

Figure 1: Knowledge, trust and attitudes to four labels among 412 Shoppers in the UK on a scale of 1(low score) to 7 (high score)

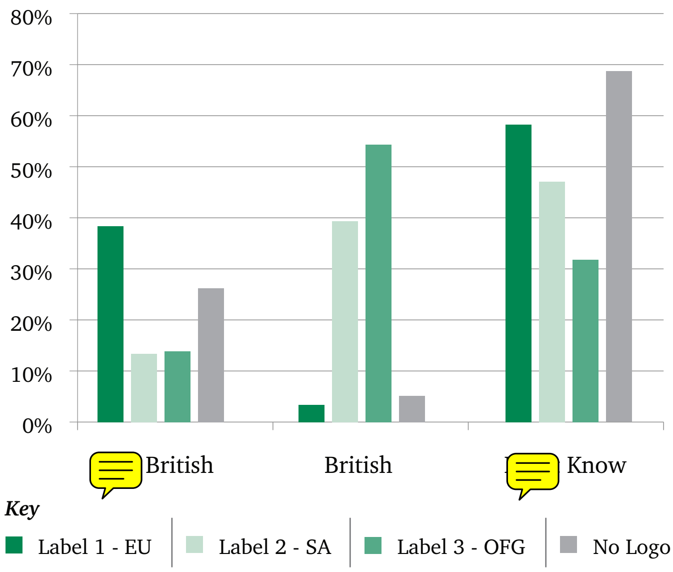


Only in response to the statement ‘This logo is well known to me’ did the no-logo option come second. Interestingly, about 45% of participants thought that the OF&G logo represents a British product (Figure 2) although it is clear that this is not always the case.

Comments made indicate that many people thought that the OF&G logo stands for a co-operative group of UK based organic farmers. The results showed higher level of awareness of the logos than had been found in focus groups conducted in 2009, where very low recognition of any logo and of differences between the schemes was found (Janssen and Hamm 2010 submitted). The difference is likely to be a reflection of differences in the organic shopping habits between the two samples. It will be interesting to see whether the differences translate to a willingness to pay more for a particular logo.

The responses to all questions revealed a very low awareness of the old EU logo. We also presented participants with a number of statements in relation to the new EU logo with which they had to agree or disagree, on a scale of 1 to 7.

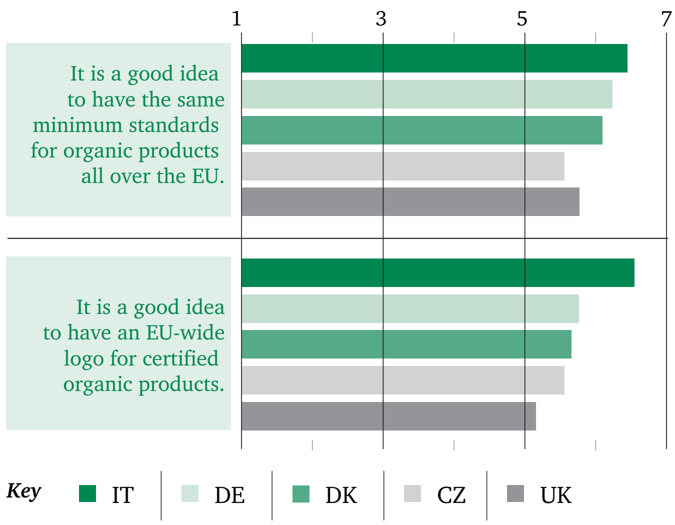
Figure 2: Do you think this logo represents a British Product



The same questions were also asked in several other countries.

The questions were asked in general, not in relation to the new logo, because this had not been published at the time of the survey. The results showed some agreement to a common European standard and logo (Figure 3) in all countries, but people did not seem aware that a common EU standard is already reality. Agreement was lower in the UK than other countries, especially Italy where the EU logo was found on 50% of the products in the inventory study.

Figure 3: Attitudes to a common EU standard and EU logo on a on a scale of 1(disagree) to 7 (agree)



The results make clear that the introduction of the mandatory EU logo is not likely to lead to negative reactions among organic consumers, although greater recognition will only be achieved if the logo is promoted. Private certification schemes may need to raise their profiles so that they remain attractive to producer, processors and retailers when the new EU logo becomes mandatory.

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Breeding efforts for healthy food

Louisa Winkler and Thomas Döring

Breeding for grain with ‘enhanced health benefits’ is a focus of the EU HEALTHGRAIN project, which believes it now has the tools to develop wheat with high concentrations of dietary fibre, vitamins and other bioactive compounds.

The HEALTHGRAIN project group discovered that among wheat varieties, differences in the concentrations of fibre and bioactive compounds are not only significant but also heritable. The project identified molecular markers associated with the compounds, pursuing a marker-assisted selection process in breeding programmes which would concentrate the relevant genes within one wheat genome. Using this approach, the group has created a high-amylose wheat variety and plans to extend efforts to create high-fibre, high-vitamin wheats.

While these results are encouraging, genetic differences of wheat varieties might in the end be less decisive for effects on health than consumer behaviour, in particular the choice of products made from white flour vs. whole grain flour. The production of white flours requires removing parts of the wheat grain which are rich in dietary fibre and other bioactive compounds.

The HEALTHGRAIN project has therefore also performed consumer research, and this perspective will be taken forward with the HEALTHGRAIN Forum, as part of which consumer and industry consultations are planned. It will be interesting to see how the breeding efforts and the project’s findings from consumer research will be integrated.

Source: www.healthgrain.org.