NATIONAL CONSUMER RESEARCH CENTRE

"Trust weakens as distance grows"

Finnish results of the OMIaRD consumer focus group study on organic foods

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

After rapid growth both in demand and supply, organic products have gained an increasingly mainstream appeal in many European countries. The stage of market development differs so that we can distinguish a group of countries with established markets, another with growing markets and a third with emerging markets. According to expert opinions, the Finnish organic market is currently in the growing category. In consequence to the rapid market development in the 1990's, the European Union has considered it essential to explore organic markets more extensively. The focus of a shared-cost research project **Organic Marketing Initiatives and Rural Development (OMIaRD)** was on how organic markets function in different countries, what type of operators can be identified, what affects their success and how consumers relate to organic foodstuffs and the way they are marketed.

The OMIaRD research project was funded by the Quality of Life and Management of Living Resources Programme, which is part of the European Union's Fifth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. It ran from January 2001 to February 2004 and involved ten partners and eleven subcontractors covering a total of nineteen European countries, both within and outside the EU. The Mikkeli Institute for Rural Research and Training of the University of Helsinki has been the responsible partner for the research carried out in Finland. The National Consumer Research Centre was a sub-contractor to the University of Helsinki and carried out the study described in this report.

The main objective in the OMIaRD project was to analyse under which market and policy conditions Organic Marketing Initiatives (OMIs) can be successful in economic, social and ecological terms, and how the beneficial impacts of organic agriculture can be further multiplied in rural regions. Within this project an OMI was defined as an organisation of actors (privately or cooperatively owned) involving the participation of organic producers, which aims to improve the strategic position of the products by adding value to the raw product through processing or marketing.

Most OMIs in Europe are small and medium-sized companies. For them it is crucial to develop a professional and successful marketing strategy, which is based on the specific consumer expectations and attitudes towards organic and regional food. In the current market situation OMIs need to compete with large food companies, and most of the products are sold through big retailers. Even in countries like Germany, France and Italy, where small special shops have taken care of almost half of the sales volume, supermarkets are gaining more popularity. In Scandinavian countries almost 90 percent of organic products are already sold through supermarkets. (Hamm et al. 2004.)

Against this background, the OMIaRD project conducted a comprehensive consumer study with the aim, first of all, to deepen and extend knowledge about attitudes, motives, expectations, barriers, future consumer demand trends, behaviour and behaviour intentions towards organic products and organic farming, with a particular focus on ethical, social and environmental dimensions. The second aim of the study has been to use this knowledge to develop marketing recommendations for OMIs.

In order to reach these aims two qualitative research methods, laddering interviews and focus group discussions, were employed in the eight partner countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and United Kingdom). In the beginning of the project a literature review was carried out through the whole Europe (Zanoli et al. 2001) to explore existing knowledge about organic food markets. It turned out that high quality research was scarce, especially at the pan-European level. This applies to Finland, too. The number of up-to-date Finnish studies was relatively limited. The existing research showed a positive consumer attitude towards organic production but did not explore consumer motivations in depth.

Consumers' knowledge about organic food varies a lot, and European countries are different in this respect. (Zanoli 2004.)

The laddering in-depth interview technique and focus group discussions were used in parallel, with the aim of looking at the general study objectives from different perspectives. The results of the laddering interviews are based on the cognitive hierarchy of a means-end chain theory (e.g. Reynolds and Gutman 1988). The laddering survey consisted of more than 800 in-depth interviews, in Finland one hundred. Through cognitive motivation structures, the study focused on barriers to purchase, preferred place of purchase, place rejection, the relevance of situational factors for choice or rejection and the role of trust builders by way of perceptions related to logos.

In all eight partner countries, six focus group discussions were conducted. In addition, another six discussions were carried out in the countries where case studies were conducted (AT, FR, IT, UK). The extra discussions were focused more on local conditions, and those results were also used in the Rural Development section of OMIaRD project. The total number of focus group discussions was 72.

The combined results of these consumer studies are published by the OMIaRD team in its publication series. An OMIaRD publication titled 'The European Consumer and Organic Food' (Vol. 4) is the first EU-wide consumer analysis of the attitudes and perceptions linked to organic products. The main aim is to help organic producers, processors and distributors to better understand what motivates consumers to buy organic products: what motives drive them to look for organic products and what barriers restrain them from purchasing larger quantities of these products. The results can also be of practical use to the organic food businesses. The research team has refined the findings of all sections of OMIaRD into a practical guide for business managers titled "A Guide to Successful Organic Marketing Initiatives" (Vol. 6). (For further details about publications, see http://www.irs.aber.ac.uk/omiard/publications/index.html.)

The OMIaRD publications do not cover separate country reports produced by national research teams. This is why the Finnish focus group discussions are reported in the publication at hand. The research team of the National Consumer Research Centre conducted this part of the research according to the guidelines of OMIaRD and in co-operation with the responsible Finnish partner, the University of Helsinki. Even though the main findings of the OMIaRD consumer studies are congruent within the studied countries, each country has its special situation and market phase in which the culture creates its special characteristics. For example, topics relating to organic foods that are treated extensively in the domestic media easily reappear in the focus group discussions. Against this background, we consider it important to make available our national findings. For the marketing implications and a more thorough discussion about the European consumers, the reader is advised to look at the above-mentioned OMIaRD publications.

1.2 Objectives

The insights gained by focus group research are derived from a free association process, and they thus supplement the strictly guided laddering task quite well. In the OMIaRD project the following special objectives can be mentioned especially for the focus group research:

- to explore the perceptions of who organic consumers are
- to assess the level of information concerning organic products and similar "competing" products (integrated, natural, etc.)
- to provide overall background information on attitudes towards organic products
- to identify the most effective way to communicate to target groups about organic products and organic market initiatives.

The last aim of this focus group research was handled by introducing to the discussants four different types of OMIs and their marketing activities. This provided for a more concrete focus. The OMIs were the same as those used in the case studies, in which the OMI was analysed by in-depth interviews of OMI actors, actors in intermediate relations with the OMI and by also looking at the whole regional context. The focus group discussions contributed a consumer perspective to this analysis, both locally and internationally. Organic marketing initiatives, their marketing strategies and the use of marketing mix measures have been a special focus in the OMIaRD project.

1.3 The course of the study as part of the OMIaRD project

The study was conducted in a similar manner in all eight countries. This applies to the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as to the structuring and writing style of the report. The research group responsible for developing instructions for all partners consisted of researchers in Germany, Italy and Austria. Before collecting the data, all researchers gathered in Hamburg in April 2002 for a training session and to discuss the details of using focus group data. After this event, the three leading partners produced instructions for the recruitment of participants (Appendix 1) and a discussion guide with detailed directions of how to facilitate and run the discussions (Appendix 2 and Appendix 3). After the data had been collected by all partners by autumn 2002, the researchers in different countries analysed two of their focus group discussions in detail and produced preliminary coding schemes that were sent to the German team for further elaboration.

In December 2002, the leading partners issued 1) a meta code book to be used by all other partners in the analysis (Appendix 4) and 2) instructions for the structure and titling of the report (Appendix 5). We made some minor adjustments to the code book, such as grouping a few codes together, and used this modified code book in our own analysis to categorise data. This report describes the Finnish results according to the framework of the OMIaRD project and the guidelines issued by the international research group. The structure and subtitles follow the guidelines except for some small modifications concerning the titles and order of chapters and the addition of this introductory chapter and chapter two on data and methods.

This manuscript was originally written during spring 2003 in order to contribute to the above-mentioned OMIaRD publication concerning European consumers’ expectations of organic foods. However, as country reports will not be included in the OMIaRD publications, the Finnish results are published separately.

2 DATA AND METHODS

2.1 Recruitment and discussants

The data were collected by focus group discussions. The focus group discussion is a method developed for social research in the 1940’s and it is increasingly used also in market research. Focus group discussions are especially useful when the opinions, ideas, experiences and expectations of the participants are of interest in the study. The group interaction makes it possible for the participants to speak ‘in their own language’ – not the researchers’ – and use their own concepts. The dynamics in the group stimulate discussion and give the informants a possibility to reflect on their own and others’ ideas. Focus groups can be used to study meanings related to some phenomenon, the production of meanings, or group norms and shared understandings. (See e.g., Morgan 1997; Bloor et al. 2001.)

The recruitment process of the discussants included mailing a preliminary questionnaire to 311 members of a consumer panel maintained by the National Consumer Research Centre (NCRC). The panel is a register of approximately 1000 Finnish consumers willing to take part in the studies of the NCRC. Half of the discussants were to be occasional users and the other half regular users of organic products. In addition, our objective was to recruit discussants with varying backgrounds. Hence, in addition to sociodemographic variables (age, education, employment and the number of children under 14 years of age), the questionnaire included questions on the frequency of buying organic products, the amount of money spent on organic foods on a weekly basis, and the ways of recognising organic foods in a shop. Furthermore, the questionnaire included a question on whether the respondent would be willing to take part in a focus group discussion about organic foods at one of the predefined dates. The purpose of the questionnaire was to screen regular and occasional users of organic foods and to separate them in groups according to background variables. Regular use was defined as buying organic food on a weekly basis and spending at least five euros on it every week. Occasional use was defined as buying organic food approximately twice a month and spending less than five euros on it per week.

One trial discussion aimed at testing the functioning of the discussion guide was carried out before the actual data collection. This discussion was not included in the analysis, but in the following, reference is made to it in cases of special interest.

The six focus group discussions took place on the premises of the NCRC in Helsinki during late May and early June 2002. The discussants were recruited mainly from the consumer panel. However, to fulfil the quotas for background variables (age, gender, etc.), additional discussants were recruited through snowballing, i.e., by asking friends and acquaintances to spread the word about the forthcoming discussions. All discussants were from the metropolitan area of Helsinki.

All in all, 73 consumers were recruited. Due to last-minute cancellations and no-shows, 55 users of organic foods took part in the discussions (see Table 1). Of them, 45 were recruited from the consumer panel and 10 outside the panel. The number of discussants in each discussion varied between eight and ten. 35 discussants were female and 20 were male. Other background information on the discussants is described in Table 2.

The discussants were given an organic product worth about 5 € as a reward after the discussion. In addition, coffee, tea and pastries were served before the start of the discussion. The discussants recruited outside the panel were given an extra reward of two free tickets to the cinema. All members of the panel get a free a subscription of the Finnish consumer magazine *Kuluttaja* published by the Finnish Consumer Agency.

Table 1. Number of discussants signed up, number of cancellations and no-shows and the final number of discussants in the six Finnish focus group discussions.

Date	Regular/ occasional users	Number of signed up discussants	Cancellations and no-shows	Final number of discussants
28.5.	regular	12	3	9
29.5.	regular	13	3	10
30.5.	regular	10	2	8
3.6.	occasional	14	4	10
5.6.	occasional	13	4	9
6.6.	occasional	11	2	9
Total		73	18	55

Table 2. Description of the characteristics of discussants in the Finnish focus group discussions (number of discussants in each category).

Date	Regular/ occasional users	Gender		Full-time job (Y=yes, N=no)		Children <14 y (Y=yes, N=no)		Education (A=academic, NA=non-academic)		Age group		
		F	M	Y	N	Y	N	A	NA	18–35	36–54	55+
28.5.	regular	5	4	6	3	5	4	4	5	4	4	1
29.5.	regular	6	4	7	3	3	7	5	5	6	1	3
30.5.	regular	6	2	4	4	3	5	5	3	2	3	3
3.6.	occasional	7	3	6	4	4	6	5	5	3	4	3
5.6.	occasional	6	3	2	7	2	7	4	5	2	3	4
6.6.	occasional	5	4	6	3	6	3	6	3	2	5	2
Total		35	20	31	24	23	32	29	26	19	20	16

2.2 Themes of the discussions

The discussion guide was developed by the German, Italian and Austrian researchers. We translated the guide into Finnish and made minor modifications so as to make it work in the Finnish context. The original English discussion guide is presented in Appendix 2.

The discussions began with an introductory round with everyone saying their first name and telling what their favourite organic food was. After this "warming-up", the first theme of the discussion concerned consumers' views and ideas of organic products in general. They were asked how they understood the term "organic" and who would be a typical user and non-user of organic products. In addition, they were asked about the importance of the origin of food, both organic and conventional. We were also interested in whether the consumers thought there were differences between various products with regard to the importance of origin, and which regions or countries they would avoid or support when buying organic products.

After this, four different types of OMIs (Organic Marketing Initiatives, see Chapter 1.1 and Appendix 3) producing organic foods were presented and a short description of each was handed out to the discussants. The OMIs produced organic fruits and vegetables (OMI A, Britain), organic dairy products (OMI B, Austria), organic meat (OMI C, France) and organic cereals (OMI D, Italy). Furthermore, there was variation between the OMIs with regard to what type of enterprise or coalition they were, how they maintained their connections with consumers and what kind of marketing channels they used. The OMIs were first presented without reference to their home country; after presenting and discussing all of them, it was revealed that they are in fact existing foreign companies. The discussants were asked about their views and opinions of each OMI with a focus on both pros and cons. The most criticised OMI was then selected for further discussion. The informants were asked to tell what kind of promotional advice they would give the manager of the OMI to enhance the success of the company and to appeal to consumers.

The third and last theme was directed to the future. The participants were asked to imagine themselves on a time trip with a machine carrying them 20 years into the future. On arrival they would notice that half of all the food sold was organic. Now, they were asked to think why this move towards organic foods would have happened and what would prevent all foods from being organic.

2.3 Facilitating the groups

In four of the discussions, there were two researchers (Johanna Mäkelä and Mari Niva) present so that one researcher would take the main responsibility for moderating the discussion and the other one would present the OMIs and write down the details of the promotional advice the discussants would produce on a flip chart. Two discussions were moderated by only one researcher. In addition to the researchers, a research assistant was present in every discussion, taking care of the tape-recorder and video camera, and taking notes (to help in transcription).

All discussions were arranged in the evening starting at 5.30 pm and lasting for approximately 2 hours. As the discussion guide was quite strict and there were plenty of themes to be covered, the discussions did not flow as freely as the discussants might perhaps have liked. On occasion, it would have been tempting to let people discuss the topics more freely. We had to interrupt the discussion quite often.

It was typical that the discussants found it interesting to talk about organic production, the images of organic products and their users as well as the importance of the origin of organic products. However, the discussants generally found the OMI descriptions relatively uninteresting as such. In many discussions, the discussants were quite happy with OMIs and did not find much to criticise about them. When discussing the OMIs, the moderators had to take quite an active role to keep the discussion on the theme, as the discussants tended to start discussing issues they found generally interesting but were not directly linked to OMIs. The unfamiliarity of organic marketing initiatives in the Finnish context was exemplified in the way in which the discussants often tended to ponder on the boundary conditions of the OMIs and organic production rather than the OMIs per se.

As all discussants were either regular (the household buys organic foods at least once a week for more than five euros per week) or occasional (the household buys organic foods about twice a month for less than five euros per week) organic users, there were no big differences in the views of the two groups, except for the fact that in the occasional users' group, the participants tended to be somewhat more sceptical towards organic foods and in some respects also slightly less knowledgeable about the details of organic production. Especially in one discussion, a more sceptical view emerged. These differences were not, however, in any way systematic but they came out occasionally during the discussions. In the following chapters, the differences between the groups are described in more detail where relevant. Had there been non-users in the discussions, the results would most probably be somewhat different.

2.4 Coding and reporting

The data were transcribed by research assistants and coded using the Atlas.ti 4.2 computer program by Mari Niva and Johanna Mäkelä. Subsequently, the analysis was based on program outputs of the coded text segments.

In the following, we have included some quotations from the discussions relating to the themes (presented in indented text) in order to illuminate the argumentation by the discussants. The gender of the speaker (F/M) and whether she/he was a regular or occasional user (RU/OU) is detailed in brackets right after each quotation, followed by an indication of the exact location of the quotation in the data (e.g., 5:1–4 would mean discussion number 5, lines 1–4 in Atlas.ti data format).

3 INFLUENCES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ORGANIC FOOD, FOOD CONSUMPTION AND FOOD PURCHASE

In this chapter, we describe the characteristics of organic food consumption and consumers on a general level based on the associations the discussants presented especially in the beginning of the discussion. In line with our reporting guidelines, the characteristics of organic foods and their consumption are in this chapter separated into internal personal determinants and external factors. The latter refers to the context in which a person operates. Conceptually, the expressions can be divided into knowledge-based and emotional meanings. Characteristics of organic food as such are described in Chapter 4.1.

3.1 Individual determinants

In verbal expressions the distinctions between individual and external determinants, or emotional and rational arguments, are in many cases not clear and meanings can be mixed (Peter & Olson 1987). They are interrelated in such a way that it is not easy to separate them. However, the discussants seemed to generally wish for a shift from ‘emotional’ to ‘rational’ argumentation about organic foods. What was once related to marginal groups and alternative social movements, like the environmental movement in the 1980’s, has become (or attempts to become) acceptable to the ordinary consumer. This tendency could be described as the normalisation of organic food consumption.

> “Earlier, when I didn't know anything about it I thought about it quite emotionally – you’d think about those ladies in green parkas. If you go out and ask what people think, well in fact everyone would think of the green parka lady, if you say ‘organic’. Especially men…(--) still, people are very emotional about this, which is quite idiotic. You shouldn't be so emotional, it's a fact that it (organic food) is purer stuff.” (M, RU, 1:103–113)

This could easily be interpreted as an external determinant, i.e., as a change in the cultural understanding and context of organic production. In Finland, organic farming has increased remarkably in the late 1990s. This has been supported by a fair amount of positive attention in the media.

Users

The characterisations of the users of organic foods follow the picture drawn of the products (see Chapter 4). The users were seen as health-oriented, enlightened and ecologically oriented, ethical consumers, who are often well educated.

> “Well I think that in principle, there are two kinds of people, some people buy it for themselves, if you have allergies or you want to lead a healthy life or something, and other people think about nature, animal well-being and natural diversity or that there won’t be emissions into waterways or something else. (--) Of course, some people think about both of the two.” (F, RU, 1:357–364)

On the other hand, sometimes there was a somewhat pejorative attitude towards people who use organic products because it makes them feel nice and it soothes their conscience.

As the high price level was seen as a threshold, the users were characterised as middle and high income families who think that organic products are good for the kids, especially if the children are young and there are not many of them. They were also seen as young urban people and ready to invest time and effort in finding and buying organic foods.

On the other hand, consumers of the organic food were also stereotyped as people involved in new social movements like environmentalism and green parties. Their use is based on ideological and idealistic commitment. The users might even be snobs, but on the other hand there was a tendency to see organic foods as ordinary and normal and nothing exceptional. Hence, the users were also described as 'modest'.

Non-users

The reasons for not using organic products can be summarised in two themes. The first one is lack of interest and the second one is limited resources, i.e. lack of money. This was raised in all discussions and in several contexts and, from the perspective of social justice, this was clearly seen as one of the big problems relating to organic products.

> "If people have big problems in surviving everyday life (--) they don't have enough energy [for paying attention to organic foods]." (F, RU, 1:375–382)

Understandably, the non-users were seen as the inverse, a mirror image to the users. The discussants thought that organic products aren't used because they are seen as fuss or that people prefer convenience foods. As many thought that health problems like allergies increase the interest to use organic food, they found that non-users do not have health problems or that their health-orientation is weaker. Non-users were also defined as consumers who do not ponder their consumption choices. One special factor, the lack of selenium in organic foods, was also introduced as an argument for non-use.

Some informants brought up an explicit contradiction between conventional and organic production. There were stories about fierce arguments between people who are for or against organic production. (NB: In 2002, a small group of activists created a Finnish website called antiluomu.org (i.e. "antiorganic.org", see http://antiluomu.org). Its aim is to fight against organic production.)

3.2 External determinants

The factors most often mentioned as a barrier to buying organic foods were related to the financial standing of consumers. The informants pointed out that the notable price gap between organic and conventional products can polarise consumers' possibilities to buy organic products. This concerns especially people with meagre financial resources. Lack of financial resources as a barrier to buying organic foods was repeated in every discussion.

One obstacle for the use of organic products was lack of information, especially knowledge about the criteria for organic foods. The question of information also boils down to the difference of rational and emotional arguments. The informants who were strongly for organic products rarely questioned their overall merit. Actually their arguments were based more on the belief that organic food is better, purer, healthier, etc (see Chapter 4.1.), but they seldom introduced any facts or research results to support this.

Occasionally, the problem of availability was raised. Some informants felt that they did not get all they wanted in ordinary stores. Especially organic meat was mentioned as a rarity.

The reasons for the use of organic products can be summarised in three themes: the well-being of animals, the well-being of humans and the well-being of the environment. Often the well-being of animals was mentioned on a rather general level. However, in the first discussion there was a lengthy discussion on mass-production poultry farms and their relation to organic vegetable farming, as the manure from these farms is used as fertiliser in organic vegetable farming. Elsewhere, it was pointed out that eating organic meat is one way of softening the fact that people still kill animals. The "well-being of humans" theme focused on allergies and additives. Usually the informants referred to their own or to their family members' problems.

The concern for the environment gave rise to discussions about biodiversity, emissions, the water system and sustainable agriculture. These could be seen as the ‘natural’ or ‘nature’s’ side of the environment. However, in the test discussion another theme emerged, related to supporting the rural way of life by buying Finnish organic products or domestic products in general.

4 MOTIVES AND BARRIERS AND THEIR IMPACT ON ORGANIC FOOD PURCHASE

In this chapter, the focus is on organic products and production without specifying the origin of products. This implies that the context is a domestic one due to the fact that the discussants' frame of reference was basically Finnish organic products except when asking specifically about products with a foreign origin. This is interesting as such, as it tells us something about how consumers interpreted organic products and largely associated them with domestic produce. A foreign origin brings entirely new aspects into the discussion, which are dealt with in Chapter 5.

4.1 Image of organic products

The image of organic foods, if looked at through a simple positive – negative division, was fairly strongly on the positive side. However, no participant could be identified as 'organic-totaller' as even the regular users supplemented their diet with conventional products.

> "It is not a matter of life and death." (F, RU, 2:98–102)

In addition, even if the discussants were all users of organic foods, it has to be emphasised that they also had critical comments and that they found a lot to improve in organic production. The discussion on the characteristics of organic food had two angles. Some thought that organic production and products are always better than conventional production. Others related the presumed superiority to certain products like organic eggs.

This section is mostly based on the answers given to the question: "what comes to mind when thinking about organic foods?" In this context, the analysis is largely based on the discussants' immediate responses without any deeper contemplation.

The image of organic products and production was more or less shared among the discussants. For the most part, the same issues came up in all discussions. Based on the discussions, we can divide the issues relating to the image of organic products into two categories. First, there are issues that consumers can judge by themselves by looking at and tasting the products. *Price*, *quality* (which in this context relates to taste, appearance and freshness) and *level of processing* are part of this category. Secondly, there are issues that are largely trust-based and cannot be evaluated by examining the products on the market or by sensory assessment but require trust in the whole system of organic production. *Purity*, *healthfulness*, *environmental effects* and *animal well-being* can be seen as trust-based factors. In addition, *Finnish origin and vicinity of production* could be seen as somewhere in the middle: on the one hand, origin is stated on the package and can in principle be easily discovered, on the other, the truthfulness of labels on packages is always open to question. Naturally, the themes interact and are to some extent dependent on each other. In the following, the image of organic products is briefly looked at theme by theme.

Organic products were regarded as costly, and when asked what comes to mind when thinking about organic foods, quite a few discussants mentioned high prices. However, price image is complicated by the fact that the discussants thought about prices in proportion to other characteristics of organic products or production. For example, they referred to the higher production costs because of more workforce and the small-scale and hand-made nature of organic foods. They regarded it mostly as self-evident that organic products are more costly than conventional products. In a similar vein, higher prices can be compensated by, e.g., good quality or healthfulness.

> " (--) I think organic foods are quite a lot more expensive than the ordinary products, but for example in organic tomatoes, there are more minerals and vitamins and everything." (F, RU, 1:186–195)

The quotation above is a good example of how the rational and emotional arguments are often hard to separate. The form of this argument seems to be based on rational argumentation but there is no evidence presented for the statement that there are more minerals and vitamins in organic than in conventional food.

Quality is in this context understood as taste, appearance and freshness of organic products. Relating to quality, there were contradictory views and experiences. Some discussants said that in their experience, organic products (especially fruits and vegetables) taste a lot better than conventional products. Others noted that they haven't generally found any differences as regards to taste. Still others had had bad experiences with poor-tasting organic foods, such as carrots, potatoes and cucumbers. Many maintained that in grocery stores, the appearance of organic vegetables is not nearly always as good as it should be. Often the products have lost their freshness. However, some discussants noted that the occasional unfreshness of organic fruits and vegetables can also be explained by the fact that there are less poisons compared with conventional products. For example, the purer the fruits are, the faster they mould or decay, whereas 'poisoned ones' dry, some argued. For them, a perfect look in organic products was not that important because it was rather purity (see below) they were after.

> "Those organic eggs taste so good, the difference in taste [between conventional and organic eggs] is like day and night." (F,OU, 4:101–102)

> "It [organic food] tastes more like what it really is. And not like something soaked." (F, OU, 6:84–85)

An interesting issue relating to the image of organic products is that the discussants associated organic products largely with unprocessed, unrefined, non-industrial foods. This was implicit firstly, in the way that the conversation most often concerned fresh products, such as fruits and vegetables and secondly, in that the discussants wished that organic vegetables were sold unwashed. Quite often, the difference between organic and conventional foods came up in classifications such as organic vs. industrial or organic vs. mass-produced food. The unprocessed and unrefined image also came up explicitly:

> "In my opinion, it is also that they [organic foods] are as much as possible 'untreated'." (F, RU, 3:70–71)

Also origin was in many ways implicit in the sense that throughout the discussions, the discussants associated organic products with domestic produce. Interestingly, the concept of organic products was not only related to agricultural products but also to the berries and mushrooms from the Finnish forests. The importance of Finnish origin and vicinity of production also came up directly as a comment:

> "I associate organic foods with domestic production. (--) I understand organic foods as coming from nearby." (M, OU, 4:71–83)

Purity, "less poisons" or "no poisons" were characteristics often associated with both organic products and organic production. On the product level, purity was closely connected to the image of organic products as healthful and safe foods; on the production level, it was linked to environmental protection and sustainable development.

> ”Less poisons." (F, RU, 1:54)

> ”Some people say that there are more poisons in organic food, but I think that the total amount of poisons in me may be less if I eat organic foods." (F, RU, 1:60–63)

> ”What comes to my mind is that organic products are grown without poisons." (F, RU, 2:56–57)

> "Purity and price." (F, OU, 4:58)

As mentioned, purity is connected to the healthful and wholesome image of organic foods. In addition, healthfulness included another dimension relating to a view of organic products containing more vitamins and minerals than conventional foods. Some discussants maintained that organic foods are better for people suffering from allergies than conventional foods.

> "What comes to my mind when thinking about organic food is that it is healthier to eat." (M, RU, 1:103–104)

Issues relating to ecologically sustainable development were brought out by many discussants when talking about organic foods. Various themes came up, such as vicinity of production, using less energy, rotation in growing crops, biodiversity and the environmental load caused by agriculture. This undoubtedly reflects the multidimensionality of environmental issues in the image of organic production.

> "I think it is, word-for-word, "natural", that it depletes nature less [than conventional production]. For instance, in milk, for the cows it's also a better way to produce milk." (F, RU, 2:59–62)

The Finnish version of the word organic – luonnonmukainen – refers to nature and naturalness. A dictionary definition of the word "luonnonmukainen" is "natural, unrefined, naturalistic, organic". This may throw some light on the quite multi-faceted nature of Finnish consumers' interpretations concerning organic foods and organic production.

Animal well-being, exemplified in the previous quotation, was brought up in two opposite contexts. On the one hand, organic animal husbandry was considered by the majority of discussants a considerable advancement from the point of view of animal well-being and proper treatment of animals. Organic meat was also regarded as good-quality and safe – another indication of how the different images interact. On the other hand, there was one discussant who brought up some highly critical aspects concerning animal well-being. This critique is presented in more detail in Chapter 4.3. Usually, the question of animal well-being was expressed on a general level without specifying the animals or the measures to be taken in order to enhance their well-being. However, chickens seem to be the case to be used often as the horror story of conventional agriculture.

> "What comes to my mind are chickens, maybe they have a better life if they're organic. My husband always makes a fuss if I buy ordinary eggs, the hens absolutely have to be free-range." (F, OU, 4:94–97)

As a concluding remark on the image of organic production, we can note a common aspect reflected in many of the associations that the discussants made about organic foods. This is the idea of organic production as something "natural", closely connected to nature in a very profound way. This came up indirectly in comments about organic production being the "original" way of farming, something that existed before the times of the green revolution and the intensive use of agricultural chemicals. From this point of view, organic production is very concretely associated with the soil, the earth and the "natural" way of growing plants. For example, in one discussion, there was a lengthy conversation about the concept of organic salads which are sold in small pots with some soil and roots of the plant. Some discussants felt that the pot salad is totally against the organic ideal as it is grown in some kind of liquid, not in real soil – and what's more, in glasshouses in the middle of the cold Finnish winter.

4.2 Actual and potential motives

Based on the discussions, the factors possibly enhancing the consumption of organic foods relate to a multitude of different aspects. It is worth noting that the reasons (and barriers, for that matter) to buy organic foods vary between various consumer groups. For some people, buying organic foods represents a statement about the desirable development of the world at large. For others, organic foods are, e.g., better for health or proper food for the children. For consumers, different kinds of developments in organic production modes may encourage or discourage the consumption of organic foods.

In the following, we will describe consumers' actual motives based largely on the discussants' conversations about organic foods in general and their reasons for buying organic foods. After this, we concentrate on potential motives based on answers and conversations about possible future developments enhancing organic production and consumption. Some overlapping with the previous section cannot be avoided as the image of organic products is in many respects associated with motives and barriers.

Actual motives

Following the classification presented in the previous chapter, we can divide the factors potentially encouraging organic food purchases into separate themes including *reasonable prices*, *good quality* (taste, appearance and freshness), *acceptable level of processing*, *purity*, *healthfulness*, *positive environmental effects* and *advancing animal well-being*. All of these emerged as associations with organic products and production in the previous chapter with the exception of availability. Furthermore, the *criteria* for organic production and organic *labels* can be seen as a kind of mediator in building and maintaining *trust*. In the following, each theme is treated separately. Origin, which is an important part of the image of organic products, is treated separately in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 the discussion about the prices of organic products is described in detail.

As the prices of organic foods are generally higher than the prices of conventional foods, price is more likely to be a barrier than a reason to buy organic products. From this point of view, lowering organic prices would most likely encourage consumers to buy organic foods. On the other hand, justifying the higher prices of organic foods (in comparison to conventional foods) and making the reasons behind the prices visible in an understandable way could be another way to enhance organic consumption.

The good quality of organic products can be a reason to buy them. People who find that organic products taste better than conventional ones may be ready to pay a little extra for the taste. According to the discussants, the looks and the freshness of organic products should tempt one to buy them, they should look at least as good as conventional products.

The level of industrial processing of organic foods is a theme with contradictory elements. On the one hand, organic production was associated with the ideal of "naturalness" in food and food production. For some consumers, this is a highly important element. On the other hand, many discussants welcomed new, more processed organic foods, which would potentially help organic production succeed on a wider scale.

The purity and healthfulness of organic foods form a family of partly separate issues. However, they are often associated with each other. As noted in the previous chapter, many discussants noted that they regard organic foods as safe to eat because they believe that they are purer and contain less residues from pesticides and fertilisers and less preservatives than conventional foods. This also makes them better for one's health, many discussants believed. Healthfulness was also linked to the idea of the better nutritional value of organic products.

Environmental factors were mentioned by many discussants as a primary reason to buy organic products. Stressing environmental issues with respect to organic foods was often part of a general emphasis on an environmentally benign way of life and the need to change current production and consumption habits more or less dramatically for the good of the environment and future generations. In a vein similar to purity and health, issues relating to the environment and animal welfare formed another family of concurrent themes. Support for animal well-being was for many discussants an important factor for buying organic meat.

In the discussants' opinion, it is of utmost importance that organic production is controlled and that the trustworthiness of organic products is guaranteed. However, they tended to speak of the control and criteria for organic production on a rather general level without specifying, e.g., who should be responsible for control or what kind of criteria should be included. Trust in criteria and control was largely implicit in arguments relating to the trustworthiness of Finnish organic foods carrying an organic label (see the following chapters). However, trust in the criteria and control were not totally shared among the discussants (see Chapter 4.3). As regards the rather general level of speaking about criteria and control, there was a slight difference between occasional and regular users. The former clearly stated that organic production should have strict criteria and control, however, some of them apparently were not sure whether such actually existed. The latter, on their part, tended to be somewhat more knowledgeable about the details of organic production methods.

Interestingly, in one of the regular users' groups it was noted that the criteria are subject to variations between product groups and that they are not a guarantee that a product is "perfect". Still, the criteria were considered trustworthy in the sense that they form a certain minimum level, which the product carrying the label has to fulfil.

> "Well, you can't help noticing that – I mean we all have a different sets of values – but if we looked at the criteria for different organic foods, we would find some criteria which we can approve and others which are not perfect. All organic foods are not equal with respect to ethical or environmental issues even if they are organic and carry the same label. There's so much variation..." (F, RU, 1:2058–2067)

The concept of "the organic label" was frequently mentioned in the discussions. Generally, the consumers would state that they trust "the organic label".

> "Basically, I trust the organic label as I know that they [the farms] are checked regularly. (--) I do trust the label." (F, RU, 1:2036–2044)

Despite the fact that there are, in effect, two organic labels (in addition to the very rare EU label) in use in Finland, there was hardly any conversation about the two labels. On occasion, someone would mention the private association Luomu-Liitto (Organic Association), which is responsible for the organic label with a ladybird symbol (Picture 1.). The other organic label is equipped with a sun symbol (the standard of which is based on Council Regulation 2092/91) and is governed and controlled by the government agency Plant Production Inspection Centre (see http://www.kttk.fi/STO/LUOMU/luomu_esitteet/luomuvalvonta_malli.pdf and Picture 2.). The two labels are based on somewhat different criteria, the latter having rapidly established its position after its introduction a few years ago. In the discussions, people would talk about "the organic label" without further specification about which label they referred to. Only in one discussion, one discussant mentioned the fact there are two different labels and that one of them has something to do with EU regulation.

Picture 1. Label by the Luomu-Liitto (Organic Association).

Picture 2. Label by the Plant Production Inspection Centre.

Potential motives

This subchapter is largely based on the groups' discussions on developments which might lead to half of all food being organic in twenty years' time. Some people doubted whether a large-scale transition to organic production would be possible, others thought that the whole of Europe could be organic if only there were political will. There were two different lines of argumentation here, one focusing on developments in society at large, the other concentrating on consumers' ways of thinking and habits of buying food.

Political developments within the EU and decisions about subsidies to agriculture in general and organic farming in specific were regarded by many discussants as extremely important in advancing organic production. According to the discussants, the EU should subsidise small-scale family farms, raise the level of producer prices and give more support for organic farming. Some argued that large industrial farms should not be subsidised at all. Tax reductions for both organic farmers and "organic eaters" were suggested. In addition to these economic measures, the participants discussed economic development in general: some discussants wanted more financial support to family farms, others suggested that in the future, organic production will be more efficient and that organic foods will be produced in bigger farms concentrating on organic production. This way, the prices of organic foods would eventually become more competitive. In general, it was noted that a fairly good economic development is required for the transition to organic production and consumption to be feasible, as it was believed that the costs of organic production will be relatively high in the future, too.

Availability and easy access to organic foods was seen as a central condition for consumers' increasing interest in them. Organic food must be available in the corner shop so that you don't have to go to a farm to get it, the discussants stated. They also proposed that schools and other public catering organisations should go for organic foods. Children who are served organic meals at school would start demanding organic foods at home, too. In addition, general awareness of organic foods would increase.

Whereas the ideas presented about economic and political developments described above are based on a view of a steady societal progress, another line of thinking proposed that environmental or health crises are necessary for organic farming to gain ground. More animal diseases, food scandals, such as poisons found in fertilisers, the development of antibiotic resistance partly because of residues in food, the ever more common allergies, research finding unknown links between (conventionally produced) food and health, ecological catastrophes, huge increases in oil prices, and so forth, would encourage people to seek purer food or force food production to take more sustainable forms, the discussants envisioned.

> "History has shown – and also in the light on everyday newspaper articles – that when we really get scared of something or start doing something about things, it's about your own lives being at risk. I mean terrorist attacks or things like mad cow disease or… Then you'll find the money for it." (M, RU, 2:2218–2232)

Also a view that sustainable development will be the dominant paradigm, instead of continuous growth, was expressed. Organic food would only be a part of this general trend. Some hypothesised that in Finland, local producers and food processors would go for the organic sector in response to the fierce competition and large-scale industrial production on the European food markets. Perhaps the big Finnish food processors would change in a more organic-friendly direction, too.

In contrast to the focus on societal developments and crises depicted above, some discussants believed that changes in people's valuations and preferences concerning food and food production would be sufficiently visible and influential to make organic food succeed. From this perspective, citizens' valuations and expectations change first, and political changes lag far behind. Some discussants felt that organic consumption could increase as a result of a counterreaction to globalisation.

An idea that "people come to their senses" and start paying more attention to environmental issues in twenty years' time was expressed as a potential reason for the success of organic products. Possibly environmental crises are needed to wake people up. If the state of the environment deteriorates badly, then people might try to make a healthy choice whenever they can. A potential for Finnish exports was seen here: if you can't choose the air you breathe in the Central Europe, then you can at least buy pure Finnish organic foods.

Even though some discussants proposed that lower prices of organic foods would increase their consumption, others, underlining changes at the individual level, expected rather that in the future, people will be more willing than today to pay more for organic foods. Price reductions were not considered to be a feasible option from this perspective.

Vegetarianism was foreseen to increase as diets based on vegetables help feed more people than diets based on animal protein. Many youngsters already grow up in homes where everyone is vegetarian. The more people want organic products, the more organic production is subsidised, it was suggested. Some discussants trusted that as people become more knowledgeable about organic food, their consumption habits will change. Also the characteristics of organic foods as such – good taste, healthfulness and purity – were believed to advance organic consumption.

4.3 Actual and potential barriers

The structure of this chapter follows that of the previous one. First, actual barriers, based on consumers' discussions on problems they find with organic foods, are described. After that, we move on to potential barriers to future increases in organic consumption.

Actual barriers

It is comprehensible that barriers to organic consumption can be seen largely as the opposite of motives. This would mean that *high prices*, *poor quality*, *unacceptable level of processing*, *impurity*, *unhealthiness*, *unfavourable* – or non-positive or negligible – *environmental effects*, *negative* – or negligible – *effects on animal well-being*, *distrust in organic control* and *criteria and labels* would be the primary barriers to organic consumption (cf. Chapter 4.2). In addition, *unavailability* is an obvious barrier. In effect, based on the discussions, these issues form – in varying degrees – the essence of the critique towards organic foods. However, looking at the details of the critique reveals that even if there are common features in motives and barriers, there are also some interesting differences.

The high prices of organic products were an important barrier to buying them for many of the discussants. On the other hand, as depicted in the previous chapter, the discussants were well aware of the higher production costs of organic production and in this respect, prices higher than in conventional products were regarded as justified. However, not everyone saw the problem of prices in the same way. As the following quotation illustrates, fewer fertilisers and pesticides can also be seen as justifying lower prices of organic foods.

> "I wonder, because they don't put any poisons or anything in the products, then that brings savings as such." (F, RU, 2:366–367)

The quality of organic foods – here the discussion focused mainly on vegetables – was criticised by many in the discussions. Their appearance and freshness, or rather the lack of them, was harshly criticised. Here again, costly organic products must be fresh, not decayed or moulded or in otherwise bad condition. If you have to throw half of your organic potatoes away because they are "off", you wouldn't buy them again, the discussants pointed out. It seems that one or a few bad experiences with a product might be enough to make one avoid the product totally for a while. The discussants stressed that consumers don't buy organic food only because it's organic, they must get something out of it for themselves, too. That is why poor quality was so harshly condemned. It is worth noting that the discussants did not differentiate between quality problems caused by production processes and poor handling in wholesale and retailing.

> "These organic potatoes, if I buy them, well they cost 70 % more than conventional potatoes and then if I throw a quarter of them away because they're in a bad shape, then suddenly they're an awful lot more expensive. It can't be so, because then I won't buy any longer. I definitely won't pay that much." (F, RU) (1:2323–2329)

As described in the previous chapter, the discussants had varying expectations concerning the processing of organic foods. Some wanted organic foods to retain their unprocessed image, whereas other would happily welcome, e.g., organic ready meals.

As described above in Chapter 4.1, organic foods catch an image of containing less pesticide residues and other poisons and thus being safer and better for health, in addition to being better for the environment than conventional foods – among many other things. These issues were largely shared by the discussants even though with varying emphasis and differences in nuances.

However, there were some doubts on both health and environmental issues. As regards health issues, in one discussion the participants pointed out that it is as easy to eat unhealthily when eating organic foods as when eating conventional foods. Health is more about food habits in general than about residues and additives, they thought. The conclusion from the perspective of marketing may be that the healthful image of organic products should not be overused. At the very least, the specific characteristics of organic products making a difference in health aspects should be openly stated.

> "You can really have an unwholesome diet with organic as well as other foods. It's not that much more wholesome than other foods. Organic butter is as harmful as normal butter, or at least almost [as harmful]." (F, RU, 1:391–395)
>
> "The organic belly can be as big…" (F, RU, 1:409)

In addition, concern about the low selenium levels in organic foods came up in two discussions. The soil in Finland is naturally low in selenium content and the mineral is added to conventional fertilisers. In organic production, selenium additions are not used, which means that people whose diet is organic-based may suffer from selenium deficiency, one discussant noted.

The environmental superiority of organic production and products was not taken as granted either. On the product level, the discussants were annoyed by the fact that organic fruits and vegetables are often packed in plastic foils to prevent consumers from cheating and weighing them as conventional products on self-service scales. Especially those discussants who stressed the positive ecological effects of organic production found it implausible that organic products are covered in plastic foils, that organic salads are grown in single plastic pots and organic products are imported from far away countries. They required a holistic approach to environmental issues in organic production and consumption and felt that from the point of view of sustainable development, contradictions such as importing exotic organic fruits undermines the whole idea of organic production.

Some people were also concerned about the purity of the soil in which organic products are grown. Here we can see an example of how environmental and health considerations intermingle. In the following quotation, the speaker is apparently worried both about the potential residues in organic foods and the environmental effects of conventional production in addition to pondering on the essence of organic production.

> "One thing which worries me about organic foods is the environments in which they are grown and what kind of fertilizers have been used there earlier. So how organic is organic actually? I want to pose this question." (F, OU, 4:64–69)

An intermingling can be seen also in the following example. In one of the occasional users' groups there were a few participants expressing quite a sceptical view of organic foods. One of the participants openly doubted organic foods and argued that there is no scientific evidence of organic foods being better than conventional foods (organic products were bought by his family members, not by himself). His doubts got some support from a few other discussants, who, for their part, stressed somewhat different aspects of distrust.

> "Now I'll have to open my mouth. (--) It's all about images, about organic food being better quality, more healthful, tasting better, more friendly to the environment, it's all images. There is no evidence, no studies proving that organic is better for health. (--) This black and white position, organic good and others bad, it really annoys me." (M, OU, 6:151–161)

> "This healthfulness and all that, that it [organic] would be somehow different... I do support organic food and the principles but I can't accept the view that it would be somehow purer, for example in bread, it's all the same ingredients as in the regular bread. (--) It's more like just a different way of doing things." (F, OU, 6:164–176)

> "(--) for me, too, the benefit is a bit questionable (--) there are quite a lot problems with the cost side. (--) Can we get benefits of the products, this pureness and quality, does it compensate for the losses [on the cost side]. It's more laborious to produce than with conventional methods. " (M, OU, 6:186–201)

In a few groups, some participants discussed a fairly recent Finnish study comparing the environmental effects of growing rye and producing milk with conventional and organic methods. The results of the study showed that the environmental superiority of conventional versus organic rye farming depends largely on whether the unit of measurement of the environmental effects is production acreage or crop yield. Thus, the study did not produce unambiguous results in favour of either of the production methods and was quite heatedly debated in public at the time of the publication. The discussants mentioning the study recognised that studies produce different results depending on the methods and measurements used and that the ecological superiority of organic production is disputed.

Even if organic animal farming was considered by many as a big improvement in animals' living condition, this met with some criticism, too. In one of the regular users' groups there was one discussant who was exceptionally knowledgeable about poultry farming. She argued that the slaughtering of chickens – both in conventional and organic farming – is totally unethical as the method is not foolproof and may cause extreme pain for chickens. She also talked about the living conditions of chickens in mass-production poultry farms and regarded it unethical that manure from these farms is used as a fertiliser in organic vegetable farming. This made an interesting connection between animal conditions and barriers to buying organic vegetables. The other discussants were surprised to hear this and agreed that there is definitely something wrong with organic criteria allowing unethical fertilisers in vegetable production.

The former case was, in effect, the only one showing distrust in organic criteria in Finland. Otherwise the criteria and labelling were not directly discussed, as noted in Chapter 4.2. This can be taken to mean that issues relating to trust in criteria and labelling did not form barriers to organic consumption with the exception of the poultry case. However, the fact the trust in criteria and labelling exists does not mean it can be taken for granted.

Another aspect in the actual barriers to organic consumption relates to the fact that there are many developments in food production and consumption that are connected to a broader movement for a more environmentally benign and socially fair global development. This makes it challenging for consumers trying act in a environmentally and socially conscious way to keep up to date and make choices.

And finally, as regards the availability of organic products, the discussants were highly critical. Organic assortments in grocery stores were seen to vary dramatically and in many shops the selection is quite limited. For example, it is difficult to find organic meat even in the city centre of Helsinki, the discussants complained. On the other hand, in other places organic meat products don't sell very well so that they have to be sold at discount prices. Many discussants also agreed that organic production must increase and the production should be large-scale and efficient before every corner shop can have them in stock. There was also some discussion about the position and arrangement of organic foods shelves in grocery stores. Many were happy with all organic foods put in one place so that they can be found in a single spot. The discussants were in different situations with regard to access to organic foods. Some lived near to shops keeping plenty of organic products in stock, whereas many did not. Obviously, there are differences between consumers in how much effort they are ready to make to get organic products. Some people are ready to go out of town to buy the products directly from the farmers, whereas others want the products to be readily available in the corner shop.

Potential barriers

This subchapter is mostly based on the groups' discussions on future developments which might prevent large-scale transition to organic production. Again, the potential barriers can be seen as the antipode to potential motives. However, the polarity is not inclusive in that there were some issues that came up as barriers but not as motives in their opposite forms.

First of all, there were doubts that organic production could not succeed on a large scale because globally, there would not be enough food for everyone as the yields of crops grown with organic methods are lower than those of conventional methods. Those who were sceptical towards the whole concept of organic farming, maintained that the transition to organic food would cause an increase in the environmental load because organic production would require much larger areas due to its inefficiency. Some people argued that the rich Europeans could perhaps afford organic foods but globally, a transition to the inefficient mode of organic food production would bring about global food scarcity and a massive famine.

> "Our position here in the West is a luxurious one, about discussing an option of getting less out of a farm [with organic production vis-à-vis conventional production]. Half of all food being organic requires that the hunger problems in the world have been solved." (M, RU, 2:2173–2179)

On a political level, it was suspected that it would not be profitable for farmers to grow organic food which means that there would not be much organic food on the market. A similar argument related to poor availability in grocery stores. It was emphasised again that people are not ready to invest much time and effort in getting organic foods. The products must be readily available in the nearby shops and easy and convenient for consumers to buy.

As organic production requires more workforce, the prices of organic products were believed to be higher than the prices of conventional products also in the future. The discussants were concerned that not everyone could afford to buy organic foods. No one knows how many poor people there will be in Finland in the future. Some wondered whether the enlargement of the organic market would lead to polarisation between the rich and the poor.

Some discussants felt that in 20 years' time, not so many changes can happen. A large-scale transition to organic production would require legislative changes, "a dictator and police forces" and restrictions for the market of conventional products. People may not be enlightened enough to be willing to buy organic foods after all, some discussants suspected.

Environmental deterioration may also be a barrier to organic production. If large areas of land are polluted, no organic crops can be grown for a long time. There was also some discussion on possible unforeseeable events which may influence organic production in the same way as conventional production. For example, animal diseases spread out by birds or insects or environmental catastrophes (e.g., nuclear accidents) may affect the safety of organic products and diminish their possibilities to succeed.

In addition, consumers' taste preferences and unwillingness or incapability to cook may act as barriers to organic consumption, some argued. Interestingly, in these arguments it was implied that organic products would continue to be mainly unprocessed food, as they are today.

A highly intriguing argument against the transition to organic production concerned the idea that if everything was organic, it would lose its importance because then organic wouldn't be fun any more. The same idea can be read in some discussants' view that if organic food was mass-produced instead of small-scale farming, then it would lose something essential of its character. Some people evidently want organic food to retain its image as being something small-scale with a romantic feeling of country-side charm and attraction. However, this argument cannot be ignored as just romantic idealism; it was supported by a view that moving to locally produced foods and small-scaled economies would support sustainable development.

5 MEANING OF REGIONAL ORIGIN AND ITS IMPACT ON ORGANIC FOOD PURCHASE

Origin was by and large an issue which was discussed throughout the discussions even before the moderator had asked about the importance of origin. For many, origin was relevant in all food purchases – both organic and conventional. On the other hand, origin gained a special importance in organic foods.

> "What's relevant in organic foods, it's the origin, it [a product being organic] is a kind of guarantee about the origin." (M, OU, 4:252–254)

In the following, we will first concentrate on the domestic vs. foreign division and then on the specific characteristics of regional origin within Finland. The details of specific country and product images are described in Appendix 6.

Finnish vs. foreign organic products

As a general rule, organic foods of Finnish origin were considered to be by far and away the best and the most trustworthy. The degree to which foreign products were trusted differed among discussants, and it depended on the country of origin and on the specific product group. Interestingly, it was mainly fruits and vegetables which the discussants referred to when talking about origin. Other product groups came up much more sporadically. It seems that it is especially fruits and vegetables in which the discussants found foreign origin problematic.

Quite frequently consumers started the discussion about origin by stating rather forcefully that they want to buy Finnish organic products and that they don't really trust foreign organic products. Often this view took an implicit form in the sense that the preference did not need to be explained, someone would simply state that Finnish products are more trustworthy and the others would agree. However, as the discussion continued, a more nuanced picture of the significance of origin emerged.

> "I feel it's more trustworthy if it's domestic [production.]" (F, OU, 4:85–86)

Organic products from Central Europe were largely regarded as being comparable to conventional Finnish foods. This view came up in several discussions and had to do with the general image of Central European agricultural products being more polluted because of traffic and industry and more full of "poisons" from fertilisers and pesticides than their Finnish counterparts. The discussants found it evident that Central European organic products are also subject to heavy traffic and industrial pollution which makes them more polluted and less "pure" than Finnish organic products. Many regarded Finnish conventional products to be a better option than foreign organic ones. This related especially to vegetables. In this context, the products most often mentioned were tomatoes.

> "Well, I feel that foreign organic production is not nearly as pure as Finnish, you can compare it with, you know, Finnish normal production." (M, OU, 6: 326–330)

> "I think, if you look at these foreign farms from an aeroplane, for instance, there's such a heavy traffic everywhere. I think there's much more of these pollutants there than here as we still have less traffic. This is what I've been thinking about." (F, RU, 2:230–235)

> "If you have to choose between Italian organic tomatoes and Finnish normal tomatoes, then I will buy the Finnish ones." (F, RU, 1:478–481)

Despite the wide agreement among the discussants about the higher trustworthiness of Finnish organic products compared with other countries, a few exceptions among the occasional organic users appeared. The suspicions related, firstly, to the fact that the growing season in Finland is short, so that organic farmers might be tempted to use prohibited substances as an aid, and secondly, to a view that the image of Finnish soil and air being purer than in other countries is only an illusion. In addition, some participants had bad experiences with the taste of some Finnish organic products, such as carrots and cucumbers. It was also noted that growing vegetables in glasshouses in the middle of the Finnish winter is not at all environmentally friendly. However, as stated, these doubts were an exception among the otherwise shared view of Finnish organic foods being purer, better-tasting and more trustworthy than imported organic foods.

Interestingly, a product being "organic" carries with it a connotation of goodness in many respects. For example, a regular organic consumer who had bought organic honey produced in New Zealand told he had wondered "how organic it actually was" because it had been transported from that far away. Furthermore, it was felt that transporting organic products over long distances compromises the whole idea of organic production as an environmentally friendly form of agriculture. For many, long transport distances were one of the reasons to avoid foreign organic foods as transporting causes environmental problems and deteriorates the quality of products.

> "Distance, well, it is about origin really. For example in pineapples, what I basically do is that if they come from Africa, then I buy them, but if they're from South America, well that's a lot farther. Or you can think about buying Finnish or English cider. And it's crazy to import beer or water, for example, from the other side of the world." (F, OU, 6:448–455)

> "I think that the "organicness" is totally lost when transporting [from Central Europe]" (F, OU, 6:337–338)

The informants also suspected that the criteria for organic production are different in various parts of the world and also within the EU. They were quite confident that the Finnish control system functions well, but had suspicions on whether the control in other countries is as trustworthy as in Finland. When pondering on the essence of trusting Finnish and especially locally produced foods, the discussants often stressed the opportunity to "go to the farm and see for oneself how things are there". Creating a trusting relationship with the farmer is not necessarily about ever actually visiting the farm, but about the possibility of doing so and the idea that someone else might already have done so (apart from the official control). Interestingly, in this context, official organic inspections were hardly ever mentioned, which may reflect the fact that consumers generally are not very well aware of the details of control systems even if they are trusted to exist and work well.

> "I think it's a general thing about how you can trust foreign products. The farther it comes from, the more you suspect (--). Checking it is harder the farther it comes from. And it's not just about 'Finland being a good and honest country', but in a same way, it must be so that a Greek would doubt Finnish products. (--) It's about distance, this trustworthiness." (M, RU, 2:589–609)

> "Easily, when it's foreign you get the feeling that even if they say it's organic or there's a guaranteed origin, there's such a long chain (--), so how could you know where it's made and packed and of what it's produced. In a way, the trust in, let's say domestic organic products, you can image there's a real farmer or producer somewhere in Finland. But if it's Belgian, it can be anything." (M, OU, 4:447–455)

In a sense, the fact that many discussants highlighted the importance of having the option of going to the farm to see how organic the farming actually is, can be seen as undermining the arguments stressing trust in the control system. Trusting organic labels is about trusting the organic inspection system, whereas demanding the possibility to go and check the farm is a method of retaining some of the control to oneself. It could be argued that if the inspection system was perfectly trustworthy, no personal control would be needed. Thus, trust in organic production appears to be a combination of personal (i.e., farm-level) and institutional (i.e., inspection system level) trust, which both have an important role. Assuming that none of them alone is enough but each one is needed implies that improving the trustworthiness of foreign organic products in the eyes of Finnish consumers may be difficult: even if the image of foreign inspection systems could be improved by campaigns, the element of farm-level personal trust in foreign farmers is far more challenging to attain.

Regionality and organic foods

Whereas the opinions towards foreign organic foods were quite critical, the significance of origin within Finland and the meaning of regional origin within the country were evaluated in much less rigorous terms.

There was wide agreement among the discussants that the nearer the products come from the better. However, the vicinity of production and organic production were largely seen as being complementary or alternatives to each other. It was not strongly demanded that organic products be produced nearby – it may be enough that food in general is produced in the vicinity so that it can be consumed fresh and without much transport contributing to environmental deterioration. In addition, there seems to some contradiction between a striving for short distances – which would mean products from southern Finland – and a striving for, e.g., purity – which would imply mostly the northern or eastern parts of the country which are less densely populated. Interestingly, the arguments stressing the importance of consuming products from producers nearby emphasised the distance as such and not, e.g., local identities or special local characteristics of food consumption.

Here again, trust is a central element. Growing the vegetables oneself at summer cottages or small allotment gardens in town brings about trust.

> "When you grow it yourself, you know what you put in the field." (M, RU, 1:79–80)

Buying directly from the farmers was considered to be a second-best option to self-farming. Many discussants did not find mass-produced organic foods nearly as attractive as foods with a clear origin and allowing a direct contact between the farmer and the customer.

For many, it may be enough that the food they buy is Finnish. For others, it is important to support small food producers in the provinces of, e.g., northern or eastern Finland. And for those maintaining that the taste of food is the most important factor, distance appeared not be an issue at all.

In conclusion, a rough sketch about the order of "best" options with regard to origin can be drawn taking account of distance (i.e., environmental considerations) and trust in organic foods. The list goes from the best to the worst with the idea "if you could really choose from these options, how would you rank them". It should be noted that the list is a sketch based on our interpretations of the six discussions. Furthermore, the role of origin is complicated by the fact that the discussants had different ways of ranking the importance of the dimensions domestic vs. foreign and organic vs. conventional production. In addition, some discussants stressed first and foremost the distance as a general guideline so that a locally (however it be defined) produced product always wins an organic one. For others, organic always wins conventional Finnish. There were also differences between product groups: in some products, it was important that the product comes from Finland (e.g., fresh milk products), in some products, the specific regional identity and the "original" origin might be stressed (e.g., pasta from Italy, see Appendix 6 for more examples). Despite the fact that a ranking list such as this necessarily is a simplification, we dare sketch a generalised ranking list of origins, based on the discussions, looking like this:

1. grow yourself
2. buy from the farmer
3. buy organic foods produced nearby
4. buy Finnish organic foods
5. buy Finnish conventional foods
6. buy foreign organic foods
7. buy foreign conventional foods with short transport distances
8. buy foreign conventional foods with long transport distances.

6 CONSUMER NEEDS AND THE FOUR OMIS

6.1 General

Chapter 6 is about the role of product-related, price-related, concept-level and promotional aspects of organic marketing initiatives in general and the four OMIs in specific. Some aspects are presented mostly on a general level, such as promotion, which is a theme applying to organic products and production across the board. In other respects, such as product-related factors, the discussion is kept on the concrete level of OMIs as it is the details embedded in the specific marketing initiatives which most characteristically form the core of the participants' evaluations. It is taken as a point of reference that the OMIs would be enterprises or coalitions operating on the Finnish market and producing their products within the country.

The four OMIs differed from each other in several respects. OMI A was a business partnership of four gardeners growing organic fruits and vegetables. The speciality of OMI A was home delivery service (box scheme). The clients could choose from boxes of different sizes and among a variety of products. The combination of products depended on seasonal availability. OMI B was a co-operative of 15 farmers producing organic dairy products: milk, cheese, curd cheese and yoghurt. It marketed their products through wholesalers in the region, organic shops and butchers and delivered products to schools. OMI C was a co-operative of about 100 farmers producing organic meat products, beef, veal, pork and lamb. Their channels were supermarkets, regional butcher stores and consumer co-operatives in the region. OMI D was a co-operative with approximately 32 member farms involved in the production, and a couple of them in the processing, of organic cereals, pasta, flour, legumes and cereals. The products were sold via large retailer chains, specialised shops and the co-operative's own organic restaurants. All OMIs emphasized their regional origin, closeness to consumers and first-class quality of their products. Closer descriptions of the four OMIs are presented in Appendix 3. These four OMIs are real organisations operating elsewhere in Europe, which were studied very comprehensively in other parts of OMIaRD project (e.g., in Sylvander et al. 2002a, Sylvander et al. 2002b, Midmore et al. 2004).

6.2 Price

The discussants approached the question of price from different viewpoints. Price has been and still is an important marketing factor of food in Finland. In fact, it is so important that in one discussion, one of the informants started to ponder on whether price is the only argument used in advertising. On the other hand, some informants thought that through advertising and marketing, it is possible to justify almost any price margin.

The conversation about the prices of organic products focused on a few separate themes, each of which is described in the following. The fact that the economic possibilities of consumers to buy organic foods differ widely was raised up again. As this aspect was discussed in Chapter 3 it is not treated here in more detail.

Firstly, there was the discussion of how much more the discussants would be willing to pay for organic products. This ignited a lively discussion about the price differences between organic and conventional products. The price interval that the discussants were ready to pay more for organic products varied from 10 per cent to 50 per cent. Most often people were ready to pay 10–20 per cent more, and 50 per cent was mentioned only once. In discussion 1, the informants started to count the price difference between organic and conventional potatoes and concluded it to be 70 per cent. This was considered to be too much. It is interesting that while the informants were in theory ready to pay up to 30 per cent more for organic products, they stated that in reality, they had paid double prices for organic products.

The reasons for the participants' willingness to pay varied little and many did not elaborate on the topic. However, sometimes idealism, e.g., saving the world for the next generations, was mentioned. An interesting detail was the idea of gender differences in willingness to buy organic meat vs. organic fruits and vegetables. One informant argued that men are ready to pay more for meat while women pay more for good quality fruits and vegetables. In one discussion, the informants raised the discussion to an other level by starting to talk about employment, as organic production was seen as more labour intensive than conventional production.

Secondly, the discussants wondered what creates the higher price of organic products and concluded the reasons to be mainly logistics and production methods. Sometimes the conclusion was that it is impossible to know the structure of the costs. On the one hand, it was believed that increasing demand for organic products will lower the production costs. On the other hand, such beliefs were labelled "idealistic illusions" (F, RU, 2:1904–1908). It was often pointed out that the very thing in organic production is that it cannot be more effective as this would mean applying the methods used in conventional agriculture, such as conventional fertilisers. There were even doubts that some companies try to take advantage of the interest in organic production by asking for unreasonable prices.

The following example illustrates consumers' notions about the producers and merchants of organic produce. One informant told a story of how she anticipates the best before date of organic yoghurts and then buys them at reduced price. The justification for this was that "the producer has already received the money so it's not out of the producer's pocket but from the retail trade's pocket" (F, RU, 1:1092–1102). In contrast to the positivity towards organic producers and the idea that it is worth paying some extra so that organic producers can earn their living, there was a certain mistrust and disloyalty towards the retail trade. It was also noted that in Finland the margins in the retail trade are higher than in Central Europe. Later in the same discussion, the whole sales system and distribution were seen as a problem in price formation. On the other hand, retail chains were seen as important from the perspective of the availability of organic products.

The third thread in the discussions around the price was the idea that the higher price of organic products means higher expectations towards the quality of these products. The participants repeatedly pointed out that higher price should also mean better quality, i.e., good taste. It is clear that consumers seldom are interested in organic products only for ideological or idealistic reasons even if they are an important aspect of willingness to buy and eat organic products.

> "The producer should take the angle of the consumer and ponder: would I really pay double the price of a normal product for this? The consumer wouldn't pay. She/he wants something for her/himself, too. It isn't enough that the tomato or the cow has been happy, she/he wants a good tomato for her/himself. The price makes you demand more [from the organic] than from the conventional products." (F, RU, 1: 2384–2392).

For obvious reasons, participants in the occasional users' groups seemed to be more interested in the price and quality relation than participants in the regular users' groups. In a way, the occasional users wanted more proof of the superior quality of the organic products.

> "How can you prove that the pastry baked with organic flour is better that the one baked with conventional flour?" (F, OU, 5:1395–1402)

A fourth point of views relates to image as price was seen as one aspect of product image. Organic production of food was compared to different brands like jeans.

> "Maybe [organic food] becomes a status thing." (M, RU, 2:1941–1949)

On the other hand, the focus on the image of organic foods was also criticised. It was felt that the emphasis on image, especially strongly opposed to conventional agriculture, overlooks the importance of quality and taste.

Fifthly, the dimension of everyday life vs. exceptional occasions was raised in the context of price. For example, one discussant pointed out that she could see herself spending money on organic food in a restaurant sometimes. However, it is an other question to buy an organic product that cost twice as much as a conventional one on an everyday basis.

The sixth subject was how, e.g., a home delivery service (OMI A) would increase the price. It was regarded as self-evident that an extra service such as home delivery would further raise the price margin between organic and conventional products.

What could be done about the higher prices? Availability in supermarket chains was seen as one way to lower organic prices as the volumes in chains are larger than in small independent shops, which were seen as expensive. Yet, many longed for old-fashioned small shops and saw that organic shops could be one way to revive them.

To sum up the discussion of prices:

> "Organic food could cost a little more but not too much more." (F, OU, 6:1475–1479)

6.3 Product

From the perspective of product-related factors, OMI A producing fruits and vegetables was the one inspiring the most discussion among the participants. With regard to OMI A, the idea of home delivery was considered somewhat problematic (see chapter 6.4). Some discussants were familiar with the concept of a box scheme as a shop specialised in organic products in Helsinki operates one. A few discussants had tried it but given it up because they weren't satisfied with the product range. However, a box scheme was not warmly welcomed by the discussants because they preferred to have the possibility of choosing the products themselves and not to buy them sight unseen. For a box scheme to succeed, there ought to be boxes of different sizes for different kinds of households, the discussants remarked. One should also be able to select what kind of products are included. For example, many people are allergic to some fruits and vegetables and it would be a shame to throw them out.

> "In practice, there's always this problem, as there was with this box scheme, that there was two kilos of potatoes and one sweet pepper or vice versa. But it was rarely what I really kind of needed. Then it's quite hard to get inspired by, for example, a recipe for a blueberry porridge which would be included. I don't mean it was bad, but in real life you're not up to it, it's somehow too demanding." (M, RU, 3:1253–1272)

The quality of the products was regarded as extremely important for a company selling their products through a box-scheme as the target must be a long-standing customership, which is challenging to maintain, the discussants remarked. The relation between quality and price must be in balance. Should the customers be unsatisfied with the products brought to them, they would quickly cancel the order altogether. In addition, they would probably not easily return to the box-scheme.

What the discussants valued in OMI A, was that products are seasonal and fresh. However, it was remarked that producing fresh fruits and vegetables in the Finnish climate is not that easy. The discussants wondered whether the product range in the winter would consist of imported products or whether it would be based on root plants or other fruits and vegetables which keep well (e.g., potatoes, carrots, onions, apples).

The discussants felt it would be a good idea to provide information about the varieties of different vegetables, how they could be used and where exactly they have been grown. Being able to make an order for a specific variety of, e.g., potatoes or tomatoes would be better still. It was also suggested that it would make sense for the company to process their foods so that the product range could include, e.g., pickled vegetables or even ready meals in addition to fresh ones.

The organic dairy products of OMI B were warmly welcomed by the discussants as the product range of organic milk products available in grocery stores is currently not that large. It was suggested that a further enlargement of the product range to include, e.g., organic ice cream and goat cheese and other goat milk products could make the enterprise even more successful.

In general, the potential for organic dairy products was seen to be great because milk products are large-scale products used by the majority of the population. The co-operative was regarded as quite a small-scale business and it was appreciated that the co-operative would be close to consumers. Generally OMI B was considered to be well worth support.

Organic meat products are currently hard to find and the discussants warmly supported enterprises such as OMI C to improve the availability of organic meat. The product assortment of OMI C did not raise much discussion as the discussants were quite happy with it. OMI C was regarded as quite a large co-operative and there were two opposite approaches to it. Some felt it is necessary for organic businesses to enlarge in order to reach a wide customership and be profitable. A co-operative of the size of 100 farmers was seen as a realistic one. Others suspected this as being even too big. They wondered how the activities of farmers would be controlled and how the co-operative would actually function.

> "A hundred farmers who have combined their efforts, I feel that's a good basis (--). Anyway, we cannot go back to the 1950's idyll of home farming (--). To get good food to eat, well, that requires this kind of commercial and sensible thing." (F, RU, 3:737–744)

Also the cereal products of OMI D were regarded by the discussants as worth support. Pasta and cereals as processed organic foods were welcomed. Some discussants suggested that processing should be a general trend in organic foods. However, some discussants noted that there are large differences in the quality of organic cereal products and it was hoped that more attention would be paid to quality aspects of cereal products . It was suggested that the products should carry information about the characteristics of organic production and also aspects relating to use characteristics of the product, such as the gluten content of flour, which affects its baking properties.

6.4 Place of purchase

The availability of organic products was one of the most harshly criticised issues in organic production. In the discussants' opinion, organic products have to be readily available in grocery stores. For organic production to succeed, the product assortment of organic products has to be wider than it is nowadays. Furthermore, organic products should be sold both in small corner shops and in large hypermarkets.

As regards the placement of organic products in grocery stores, there were two opposite trends. Some discussants in the regular users' groups found it annoying that in some shops, organic products are placed each within their own product category which means that consumers looking for organic products have to walk through the whole shop to find them. On the other hand, in the occasional users' groups there were discussants who found the exact opposite irritating. They regarded it as better that when looking for a product of a certain product group one can easily see if there's an organic option available or not. In the Finnish grocery stores, the trend is nowadays toward the placement solution supported by the latter discussants.

As regards the OMIs, the box scheme of OMI A was the most intensively discussed single theme. Some discussants felt it would be quite marvellous that someone would bring the fruit and vegetables to one's home so that one could avoid carrying the shopping around. The majority, however, felt it would be quite inconvenient to have to be home at a predefined time of the day waiting for the delivery – and do the same every week. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the delivery service isn't necessarily that ecological if the car drives around the city delivering a small amount of boxes to customers. Some suggested that the system could work better if the delivery was to workplaces instead. Then it would be easier to attain larger volumes, as well.

Whereas the box scheme was not regarded as a viable option, an "organic van" (similar to the concept of an ice cream van selling ice cream in multipacks at specific times and places around the town) was suggested instead. This idea came up in every discussion and the discussants were actually quite fascinated by it. A van selling organic fruit and vegetables – and preferably other products as well – ringing a bell on the street would be likely to attract quite a few buyers, the discussants maintained.

It was regarded as important that the products be available also in ordinary grocery stores because for consumers, it is essential to see the products oneself and retain the freedom of choice. Sales stands in market squares or shopping centres in the suburbs were also proposed. Many mentioned farmers who come to residential areas, put a note in the hallways of blocks of flats announcing that their products can be bought nearby at a certain time. It was suggested that also larger co-operatives could use this kind of direct sales method.

The discussants were quite happy with the sales channels of the milk products in OMI B. Many especially appreciated the delivering of milk to schools so that children would get organic milk products. It was suggested that also other large catering units could buy the products.

The idea of supermarkets as a main sales channel of OMI C's meat products was welcomed by the discussants. The large volumes would help in marketing the products to supermarkets. As mentioned, they saw it necessary that organic (meat) products are sold in ordinary stores for everyone to buy. Going to special shops was regarded as requiring too much effort for the majority of consumers. On the other hand, some consumers felt that small specialised organic shops in the city centre might succeed, if only the location was right.

Not surprisingly, the discussants considered large retailer chains to be a sensible sales channel also for organic cereal products in OMI D. However, the views on organic restaurants were conflicting. Some felt it would be great if there were organic restaurants. Others considered restaurants to be quite an ambitious effort and compared the idea with vegetarian restaurants which haven't succeeded that well in Helsinki. Still others found organic restaurants as sounding a bit strange in the context of OMI D and said it would make more sense for the co-operative to concentrate on the core business instead of diffuse efforts.

Interestingly, the discussants found contradictory elements in the targets of OMIs. One of these related to combining closeness to the consumers and selling the products through wholesalers as in OMI B. A similar contradiction appears to exist in OMI D, which emphasises a direct contact with consumers but sells its products to large retailer chains. The discussants were curious to know how the co-operatives would accomplish these targets and what "closeness to consumers" really means. The contradictions raised discussion about the dilemma between economies of scale and the small-scale nature of organic production. Some argued there is an insolvable contradiction, whereas others disagreed.

> "Selling through big grocery stores is the only way to do it if you want the products everywhere in the country for the large masses of consumers. But then that's in contradiction to supporting local economies and direct contact to consumers. This is a contradiction you can't get around (--), somehow they have to be conciliated." (M, RU, 2:698–709)

> "(--) well, there are synergies in retail chains. When there's one big, then (--) they may optimize the transports or (--) something so that there may be something that supports environmental protection. They can still buy from the local [producers] even if the chain were gigantic (--). I don't think it's necessarily against organic thinking to sell in big stores." (M, RU, 2:749–773)

To summarise the discussion on different sales channels of organic products, we can see several different options – each with its own characteristics. First, self-picking on the farm was suggested for fruits and vegetables. Secondly, there's the option of buying directly from the producer. Different ways of arranging this were suggested: going directly to the farm, farmers coming to market places or to suburban areas to sell their products or an "organic van" type of arrangement. In the context of home delivery services, also Internet buying was mentioned, but that did not raise much enthusiasm. Special shops were supported by some discussants, but the majority seemed to agree that the way to success is through large supermarkets – which requires considerable volumes and marketing efforts.

6.5 Promotion

Promotional activities by enterprises producing and selling organic products were regarded as extremely important – but at the same time difficult – by the discussants. Organic marketing in Finland today was seen to be in its infancy. There are several factors which make promotion problematic. Firstly, succeeding in marketing is a precondition for succeeding in the markets, it was held. The difficulty in promotion is that for organic production to be profitable, it has to serve a broad clientele including both idealists seeking for a better environment, health-oriented consumers and those searching for premium quality and taste. The discussants noted that different marketing arguments and different organic concepts appeal to these groups but the enterprise has to think about all of them in order to stay in business. A second difficulty was noted in the fact that making the name of the company known among consumers is expensive and time-consuming. Even if, e.g., the Internet may widen the marketing possibilities, it alone cannot solve the problem of making the company and its products better-known. Small-scale organic producers often lack the resources to market their products efficiently. A third difficulty relates to the fact pointed out by some discussants that food marketing is largely based on inexpensive prices. Organic foods can rarely compete with the lower prices of conventional products which makes marketing a challenging endeavour.

It was regarded as problematic that the OMIs producing different kinds of products are separate cooperatives or partnerships each selling the products on their own. Larger alliances selling products from different product groups and processing organic foods into ready meals were proposed.

In addition, large food processors should develop product families based on organic ingredients and make organic production both better-known and appealing to larger consumer groups, the discussants argued. Brands were seen to be powerful: if consumers find a certain product sold under a specific brand to be good, they easily also buy other products of the same brand. That's why brands should be developed and marketed in organic products as much as in conventional products. A good brand was associated with strong images. There was also some discussion about the role of the organic label in promotion. The label should be "a strong brand", the discussants maintained. When seeing the label on a products, consumers would immediately know that the product guarantees certain qualities and fulfils certain requirements.

Also grocery stores could give the label a more salient position and promote organic production through product demonstrations and by providing consumer information both in the form of short "slogans" about organic products and in the form of leaflets with matter-of-fact detailed information about organic products and production. It was demanded that information be given on a very concrete level. It is not enough to say that the enterprise strives for the protection of nature but it has to be specified what exactly it is doing to reach environmental improvements.

One of the emergent themes was related to the openness of farming – and again, trust in organic production. As one discussant put it, when asked about how organic products should be marketed:

> "That it's open, that you can go there any time. (--) That it's not closed so that you wouldn't be allowed to go there." (F, RU, 1:2069–2082)

Those discussants who were of the opinion that Finnish organic products are purer than their European counterparts agreed that it would be wise for Finnish organic producers to export their products and use purity as a marketing argument. Some even went on to suggest that Finland as a whole could be an organic production area exporting pure products into other countries. Even those who suspected whether organic production really is better for the environment and human health agreed that organic marketing should retain to the image of environmental friendliness, healthfulness and purity. The fact that organic products are free of preservatives, additives and pesticides was regarded as an excellent marketing argument.

As mentioned earlier, one of the discussants held the view that using poultry farm manure as a fertiliser in organic vegetable and grain growing is unethical from the point of view of animal well-being. From this perspective, it was proposed that using "ethical fertilisers" as a marketing argument could appeal to people concerned about animal well-being.

Some discussants pointed out that it would be nice to know the "whole story" of a product, how it was produced and what kind of stages it went through before reaching the consumer. This could be interpreted as a sign of the importance of the idea of "from farm to fork" and the traceability of products. Product packages were mentioned as potential sources of organic information. For example, organic milk cartons could include information about what organic cows eat and drink and about the conditions on farms. However, other discussants felt that information and "education" about organic production should be given through the media, such as newspapers, rather than in leaflets, packages and such. They felt that organic marketing should draw on the conventional methods of marketing and not resort to old-fashioned educational and "enlightening" efforts which were seen as unlikely to succeed. For example, campaigns such as "organic weeks" in restaurants and work canteens may be a good way to introduce consumers to organic products.

In the following, we present some issues relevant in the promotion of the specific OMIs. In the box-scheme of OMI A, it was suggested that recipes could be included within each box as this would tempt people to try new dishes. Providing consumers information about the varieties of vegetables and farm locations was also favoured. As remarked earlier, a box scheme was not regarded as a viable option and an "organic van" was suggested instead. Should the distribution of products be based on an organic van concept, delivering notes to households about the company and its visiting times nearby could be part of marketing. However, advertisements in local free papers would bring about more trust in the company than simple notes in the letter box, some argued. Give-away products were also suggested as a way of promoting the concept of the organic van. For example, after buying a certain amount of potatoes, an extra package of potatoes would be given for free. Some noted that it would also be great if specialities for special occasions, such as birthday parties, could be ordered in advance via the Internet.

In regard to OMI A with the four organic gardens, the discussants felt that the gardeners should stick their neck out and be visible in the promotion personally as this was regarded as a fairly small-scale business partnership. The smaller the enterprise, the more important it is to build personal trust between the producer and consumers.

As regards OMI C with meat products and OMI B with dairy products, it was suggested that the farmers could improve animal well-being even beyond organic criteria and use this as a marketing argument as there are people who would value this kind of ethical commitment.

The promotional activities of an OMI C type co-operative producing organic cereal products were largely welcomed by the discussants. Consumer information was regarded as necessary and recommended. This applies also to advertising the co-operative's own organic restaurants. On the other hand, many suspected the feasibility of organic restaurants as organic products are not necessarily available on a continuous basis. Providing information about the contents and meaning of protecting natural resources was also considered a good thing. Product packages could contain information about the farm that has grown the grain and also about when the flour was ground and when the product was made. Someone suggested that an even better idea would be putting small flour mills in grocery stores so that consumers could buy really fresh flour from their corner shops. The scent of freshly ground flour in the shop might even increase the sales of flour, the discussants remarked.

Supporting the local economy (mentioned in the OMI D description) was also regarded as especially important and worthwhile as a reaction to the general tendency of concentration in the food markets.

What is poor promotion?

The discussants felt that the marketing for organic products should not be too “green” . Instead, marketing should emphasise that organic products are for everyone. The image of organic products should not be too “exotic”. Also berating conventional products in marketing was considered inappropriate.

6.6 Acceptance of foreign OMIs

In this chapter, we describe the discussants’ ideas about OMIs after hearing that they were foreign enterprises and how they felt about the idea that the OMIs would import their products to Finland.

The first reaction of many discussants after hearing that the OMIs are foreign enterprises was quite opposing: the OMIs should stay out of the Finnish markets. Not surprisingly, the participants agreed that they would rather see these companies producing their products in Finland as they generally preferred Finnish products to foreign ones. However, import was regarded as sensible for those products which cannot be produced in Finland, such as many fruits and vegetables. Some would note that if the imported products tasted extremely good, they would be ready to buy them even if there were Finnish substitutes available.

However, after some contemplation, the discussants differentiated between the OMIs. The acceptability of OMI D, producing cereal products, was fairly high as the products keep well and especially Italian pasta was seen to be the valued “original” pasta. Italian pasta would get some added value from being organic. However, not everyone agreed that even OMI D would be welcome on the Finnish market. For example, no point was seen in buying Italian flour because Finnish flour is amply available.

Some discussants regarded OMI C with French meat products as a possible one. French meat could gain the image of being something extra, a somewhat luxurious indulgence, if marketed effectively. However, others did not want to see European meat products imported because of the recent food scandals.

OMI A with fruits and vegetables got an ambiguous response. Some would maintain that the freshness of vegetables suffers when they are imported. Britain was not considered to be an obvious choice as a country from which to import fruit and vegetables. Others noted that a large share of fruit and vegetables is imported anyway because of the restrictions set by the Finnish climate conditions and felt that OMI A could be fairly well accepted.

OMI B with milk products got a contradictory reception. Many discussants didn’t see much sense in importing milk products, especially fresh products, such as milk or yoghurt. On the other hand, some welcomed Austrian cheeses and said they would be happy to taste them.

7 DOMESTIC CONVENTIONAL OR IMPORTED ORGANIC?

Based on the six discussions, we can conclude that consumers' views and ideas about organic foods are multifaceted and complex. Consumers have different, even contradictory expectations and views. There is no one shared view of what organic foods are, what they represent and how the production and consumption of organic foods should develop in the future. This finding is in line with other studies on consumer perceptions of organic foods (e.g., Tiensuu, 1998; Lindfors, 2001; Arvola & Lähteenmäki, 2003). Furthermore, had we included non-users in the discussions, the picture would most probably be even more complicated.

We can divide the issues relating to the image of organic products into two categories: firstly, issues which consumers can judge for themselves by looking at and tasting the products and secondly, issues which are largely trust-based and cannot be evaluated by examining the products on the market but require trust in the whole system of organic production. Price, quality (which in this context relate to taste, appearance and freshness) and level of processing belong to the first category, whereas purity, healthfulness, environmental effects and animal well-being are part of the second. Origin and vicinity of production could be seen as somewhere in the middle: on the one hand, origin is stated on the package and can in principle be easily discovered, on the other, the truthfulness of labels on packages is always open to question. Naturally, the themes interact and are to some extent dependent of each other. When looking at consumers' willingness and possibilities to buy organic foods, the above-mentioned issues play a salient role. In addition, ample availability of organic foods is a precondition for consumers to be able to buy them.

Consumers' reasons to buy organic foods are various combinations of the above issues. A few examples: For some, health aspects may be the primary reason, perhaps combined with environmental considerations. Interestingly, the purity of organic production was one of the most popular reasons to favour organic foods. However, what purity actually means was seldom elaborated even though concepts such as chemicals, residues and generally "poisons" were mentioned (cf. Tiensuu, 1998). It seems that the conventional production in Finland is seen as similar to organic production in Central Europe. Other consumers may look for superior quality and taste and at the same time, worry about the environmental load caused by long transport distances. A preference for Finnish organic foods was often explained by the fact that transporting food from far away pollutes the environment, which is thought to "reduce" the "organicness" of organic foods if looked at the level of the whole system of food provision. Interestingly, the reasons to favour locally produced foods relate to transport distances as well. Regional food cultures, which might be expected to have a role here, did not seem to be important in buying organic foods. This might indicate that organic foods are more readily related to ecological questions than to cultural identity. This does not, however, mean that food is not acknowledged as a part of the national identity, but this dimension is associated with local, perhaps conventional, food production rather than with organic production. Still other consumers may support organic products because they represent a turn to global responsibility both in the sense of environment and social justice. Organic foods are both something concrete to eat and a part of the global politics of food and the environment.

One of the most central elements of organic foods relates to trust. Trust in organic production and organic foods was a theme coming up throughout the discussions. It was especially eminent in three contexts, 1) with regard to the environmental and health effects of organic foods, 2) in relation to criteria and control for organic production and organic labels and 3) in the context of origin, both "globally" and "locally". Furthermore, trust involves both personal and institutional trust (see, e.g., Luhmann 1979 for a general discussion on these dimensions; Kjærnes 1999 for an application in the context of food). On the one hand, it is essential that the farmers are trusted to do their best to guarantee the quality of products and obey the rules of organic production. On the other hand, trust in the system of organic production with all its criteria and labelling requirements is essential. Furthermore, the trustworthiness of research on environmental and health effects can be seen as part of the formation of the institutional trust.

The recurrent discussion on apples nicely epitomises some aspects of the Finnish consumers' views on organic food production. The Finnish consumers are quite confident about the safety of the (Finnish) food production and foods on the market despite various European food scares (Piiroinen et al., 2004). Therefore, they often feel that domestic conventional production is a better choice than imported organic foods. It seems that domestic apples are highly valued by the consumers. Regardless of production type they are seen as so "safe" that they can be eaten with their skins on. Many regard domestic conventional food production as almost organic. Hence, the interest in imported organic apples is limited. The level of trust towards Finnish production and control is so high that it in a way leads to an inherent distrust towards "foreign" foods.

The analysis of discussants' ideas about organic food revealed three contradictions. The first one was the blurring of "facts" and "trust" concerning organic products. The ideas that the concept of organic products inspired were often presented as facts: organic food was said to be healthier, purer, better for the environment. However, it soon became clear that these ideas were based on general trust in the goodness of organic foods rather than knowledge of specific scientific evidence of health effects or environmental friendliness of organic products. The discussants often referred to different labels, which they trusted to guarantee the quality of organic foods. This indicates that the images of organic foods and organic labels are quite strong. It seems that the presumed healthfulness of organic products is one of the main reasons to use organic food. Interestingly, it seems that the interest in organic products is often triggered by a personal reason that usually is health-related. Allergies were mentioned most often, followed by a fear for additives and pesticides. The drive for sustainable development was also present, but not as regularly as the idea that organic products are ”good for me and my children”.

A second contradiction could be called personal vs. anonymous organic products. For many informants the very essence of organic food was that it is not anonymous, i.e. both the physical distance and the "psychological distance" is short. Ideally, this means that it is possible to buy directly from the producers. On the other hand, some discussants pointed out that the condition for successful organic production is that organic foods must shake off the image of being food for alternative people and be available in the nearest supermarket. Arvola and Lähteenmäki (2003) found a similar dual view among consumers: some welcomed new processed organic foods, whereas others saw them contradicting the idea of organic food.

This leads us to the third contradiction which is between efficient and small-scale production. The informants who stressed the importance of vicinity often saw organic production as small-scale. These discussants criticised the large Finnish food processors' organic food policies which are based on offering "organic options" among conventional product families. They found that the companies are not really committed to organic foods. For example, they referred to the rye bread product line of one large bakery which includes different types of the same bread (e.g., traditional, low-salt, sliced and organic). Others, however, saw this as efficient and pointed out that the conditions for the profitability of organic production are efficiency, good marketing and proper logistics.

It is worth pointing out that the old contradiction between organic foods as exceptional – not part of everyday life at large – and organic foods as common and customary seems to be blurring. Organic foods used to be seen more or less as an ideological statement, whereas today they are an option for people interested in, e.g., their own health. At the same time, the idea of green consumerism has been gaining more attention.

And finally, we would like to conclude by quoting one of our discussants who pondered on the implications of the many developments in food production and consumption which are part of the overall efforts toward a more environmentally benign and socially fair global development. For consumers, trying to reckon the meaning of the developments and making choices in the everyday life is becoming more and more complicated. How is it that one can survive in the jungle of ethical commitments?

> "This world has become so complicated that as a consumer, when you think about organic food and fair trade and sustainable development and local food, it's difficult keep them separate, I mean what's part of organic food and what's not. They are all there in the same 'pot of porridge'. For example, fair trade bananas are not necessarily organic. It all requires an awful lot of knowledge and thinking about these things (--), if you want to keep a certain ethical line. It's quite tough for consumers. Somehow this world and the rules should be made clearer, I think." (F, RU, 3:629–641)

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Appendix 1. Instructions for the recruitment of participants

Organic Marketing Initiatives and Rural Development (OMIaRD) QLK5-2000-01124
P9
SWP 4.3
Screening questionnaire for recruitment **April 02**

Recruiting and Quota instructions for groups in potential markets (questionnaire A)

1. How often do you buy or consume organic food?

Regularly	☐	Regular means at least one purchase per week (at least an expense of 5 Euro/week or 20 Euro/month).	→ question 2
occasionally	☐	occasional means 2 purchases per month	→ question 3
never	☐		→ question 3

2. **How do you identify organic products?**
Interviewer: Don't read out possible answers. Multiple answers are possible.

Organic food label	☐	*satisfying*	I buy fresh products	☐	*not satisfying*
I buy in organic food shops	☐		I buy at weekly markets	☐	
I buy in organic at an organic farm	☐		I buy in health shops	☐	
Code number of the certification body	☐		**Other**	☐	

To be assessed by interviewer (interviewer's impression is important):

Answers are satisfying ☐ → Quota "regular consumer" fulfilled
not satisfying ☐ → Quota "occassional consumer" fulfilled

3. Are you working full time?

Yes ☐ No ☐

4. How many people in your household are younger than 14?

☐

5. What is your highest standard of education?

Compulsory education ☐
Matura, A-Levels, Baccalaureate ☐
University ☐

6. Could you please tell me your age?

18–25 ☐ 26–35 ☐ 36–54 ☐

7. male ☐ female ☐

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Hamburg

Recruiting and Quota instructions for groups in OMI regions (questionnaire B)

1. How often do you buy or consume organic food?

Regularly	☐	Regular means at least one purchase per week (at least an expense of 5 Euro/week or 20 Euro/month).	→ question 2
occasionally	☐	occasional means 2 purchases per month	→ question 2
never	☐		→ question 3

2. Do you know OMI X ?

Yes ☐ ↓

3.1 Which products of OMI X do you know / buy?

____

____

No ☐ ↓

Give examples of your OMI's products!

3.2 Do you know product x?

Yes ☐ ... No ☐ ...

To be assessed by interviewer (interviewer's impression is important):

Interviewee knows OMI X ☐ → Quota "OMI recognition: YES" fulfilled

Interviewee doesn't know OMI X ☐ → Quota "OMI recognition: NO" fulfilled

4. Are you working full time?

Yes ☐ No ☐

5. How many people in your household are younger than 14?

☐

6. What is your highest standard of education?

Compulsory education ☐

Matura, A-Levels, Baccalaureate ☐

University) ☐

7. Could you please tell me your age?

18–25 ☐ 26–35 ☐ 36–54 ☐ 55–60 ☐ 60+

8. male ☐ female ☐

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Hamburg

Recruiting and Quota instructions

Region	OMI region (each of the selected case study regions – OMI_A in Austria, OMI_B in Italy, OMI_C in France and OMI_D in UK)			Potential market (each of the 8 partner-countries is defined as a potential market for the product groups of OMI_{ABCD})		
Quota	OMI recognition: yes		OMI recognition: no	Regular consumer		Occasional consumer

Within groups there are the quotas of

- gender (25-40% male),
- age (at least 25% of each 18-35, 36-54, 55+),
- children (at least 25% have children younger than 14),
- employment (at least 25% are working full time)
- education (at least 50% are non-academics).

Appendix 2. Discussion guide

OMIaRD QLK5-2000-01124
Focus groups
P9, P2, P10 **April 2002**
Discussion guide **Guide A: Potential market**

A: Question 1 15min	Introduction	Directions	Hints and stand-by questions for further probing	Objective
	• Introduce yourselves and explain your roles. • Describe OMIaRD and it's purpose briefly. • Mention the purpose of the camera, tape recorder as well as protection of privacy. • State that issues concerning food purchase decisions will be discussed.	Very briefly. Don't stress your membership in OMIaRD as the moderator is an independent person.		
	Start by getting each person to introduce themselves (name and what dish describes their personality best).	The moderator could decide to introduce him/herself too, in order to give an example of what is expected in the introduction round. **When the introduction round has finished, sum it up as if you got a menu: "Now we have a big variety of different and very special food. Altogether it is a complete menu."**	• Let everybody talk, get in contact with participants by showing interest in what every single person says. Have a very brief conversation with everybody. • Alternatively you could ask for their favourite dish or ask them to give themselves nicknames picturing their eating behaviour.	To get to know each other, warming up; to create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere.

A: question 2 **30 min**	**Organic Products and regional origin**	**Directions**	**Hints and stand-by questions for further probing**	**Objective**
2.1	**What comes to your mind when you think of organic food?**	• **1st step**: don't probe too much as we are interested in top of mind knowledge. • You may want to visualize the answers. As part of the 2nd step you could then ask if somebody wants to comment on it or if some-body wants to add more. • **2nd step**: when there are no more top of mind replies to question 2.1 probe further → • **keywords**: products, people and process (production)	• What does organic mean to you? • What kind of people buy organic food?/Who is a typical buyer? • Who would never buy organic food? • Who would never enter an organic food shop? • How would you describe the organic food offer in one sentence?	• What aspects are mentioned <u>spontaneously</u> when describing the characteristics of organic products? • Information about organics and organic farming, to get an idea about the **attitude**, the **image** and **knowledge** about organics. • (Products, people who buy, related issues, strength and weakness and so on.)
2.2	**Assume that you were buying an organic food product, what role does the origin of the product play in your choice?**	• Keywords for this question are trust, quality and provenience; but wait and see if these topics are mentioned unaided. • In a discussion with occasional/non-consumers: • If they talk about food in general, ask them also if their statements would be different if they thought about organic food.	• Do you look at where the products come from? • What difference does it make to you whether the product is local or whether it comes from other regions, either from your country or from another European country? • With which products do you consider the aspect of origin as important, where is it unimportant? Why? • From which region do you like to buy which region do you avoid? Why?	• To grasp the importance of product **origin/regional origin**. Interested in all issues concerning the origin of the products. • Regional origin, special provenience inside and outside the home market.
Break (5 min)		• You may want to give the participants the possibility to relax and refresh before going on with the main part of the discussion.		

A: question 3 **60 min**	**What makes an OMI successful? Hints for marketing.**	**Directions**	**Hints and additional questions for further probing**	**Objective**
3.1	**What strikes you positively, what negatively? Why?**	• Show them the OMI concepts. Hand out paper prints. • Tell them to underline parts, they think that are noticeable or special. • Tell them that all these organisations are local ones • Show all 4 presentations and rotate the order in each discussion. • Keywords for 3.1 are the headlines of the OMI presentations: size/structure of OMI, objectives and distribution types. If they don't discuss these points unaided, probe on them.	When there are questions of participants you as the moderator can't answer, give them back to the participants: "How would you like this aspect to be?"	• To elicit factors of success out of a consumer's perspective. • To relate general demands and expectations to product groups and organisational structures of the OMIs. • **Link to OMIs**

A: question 3 **60 min**	**What makes an OMI successful? Hints for marketing.**	**Directions**	**Hints and additional questions for further probing**	**Objective**
3.2	**Imagine a friend of yours is manager of (see directions). What would you advise your friend to make better?**	Choose the OMI concept which was discussed most considering points that were perceived as bad/impeding for success. • Tell them that consumers are experts and practitioners. Consumers know what goes down well. • Visualize the 5 areas* of marketing – in words that are graspable for your participants – as visual aids. • Also visualise the answers. • Ask continually if the ideas and statements they give would have an effect <u>on themselves</u> **→ be sure to have the consumer link!**	When discussing this topic please think of issues like product quality (what quality is about, how to convince people about the quality, what makes an organic product different from a conventional one), how to build trust, how and what to communicate about your offer and where and how to sell your products. • Why do you think your idea of xy would match organic food well? • With what kind of organic product would they be successful? • Do organic products automatically have a superior quality? What should they pay attention to regarding quality aspects if their products shall be successful? • Where should they offer their products? • When doing sales promotion for organic products, how should the point be made? How should the promotion be? And how should it not be at all? • Do people want more information about the topic organic food at all? Do people find the topic interesting? • A crucial point is the price. Which price do you consider as reasonable in relation to conventional products? Where should it orientate to?	• To elicit factors of success out of a consumer's perspective. • To relate general demands and expectations to product groups and organisational structures of the OMIs. • To have them express their ideas about **factors of success** for organic companies, **consumer needs** as well as **prejudice** against organic food market. • To elicit projections. What wish the participants for marketing activities/products? (consumer needs, consumer closeness, convenience, costs, communication) • To elicit **expectations** and **demands** regarding organic marketing as well as the **personal relevance** and influence of actions. • **Link to OMIs**

A: question 3 60 min	**What makes an OMI successful? Hints for marketing.**	**Directions**	**Hints and additional questions for further probing**	**Objective**
3.3	**We have seen 3 other examples: would it make a difference if your friend was manager of one of these?**	• Discuss the other product categories whether there are any consequences. • Then tell them the OMIs are not local: OMI A is in GB, OMI B is in Austria… • Ask them whether it makes any difference for their advices.	• Please imagine that these organisations actually exist. But they are situated in [actual country of origin] and you want to market the products here. In what respect would you act differently?	• To elicit which products can easily be marketed nationwide, respectively internationally. • Are there preferences regarding the origin with certain products? • **Are there barriers/ prejudice/attitudes concerning foreign products/product groups/ foreign regions** and if so of which quality are they? • **Link to OMIs**

*** 5 Cs instead of the 4 Ps: consumer needs, consumer closeness, convenience, communication and costs.**

A: Question 4 30 min	**OMI$_{ABCD}$-products - Motives and barriers for purchase**	**Directions**	**Hints and additional questions for further probing**	**Objective**
Introduction	**Imagine we are going on a time trip. There is a time machine which carries us 20 years into the future. On arrival we notice that now <u>half of any sold food is organic</u>. Especially (product groups offered by OMI$_{ABCD}$) are very successful!**	• Tell the time trip story how it suits your participants best. Take them with you by developing the story with pictorial descriptions. • You may have them imagine that they have been living in Australia for 20 years. When they arrive home newspaper headlines at the kiosks announce that 50% of the food is organic.		
4.1	**Why do so many people buy organic food?**	Ask for various reasons, don't accept only food scares.	What happened in society, economy, policy, technology, environment?	• To elicit **motives for purchase/usage** and **benefits** of buying/using organic products. • To grasp **expectations** for future actions, **future consumer demand trends**. • To elicit **needs** and **wants**.
4.2	**Why don't they buy 100% organic food in 20 years time?**	If the price issue is mentioned again, then let assume that the price for organic food equals that for conventional products.	Despite of the success of organic food – what can still prevent people from buying almost everything in organic quality?	• To elicit **barriers for purchase**. • To grasp future consumer demand trends.
The finish	Thank them for participating and ask if there is something left they would like to contribute or if there is something important they feel they would have liked to discuss.		A final question is helpful in agreeing on final positions or overall statements of participants and may illustrate the general attitude participants have towards the subject.	

Appendix 3. OMI descriptions

Organic fruits & vegetables

Who we are:

- A business partnership of 4 gardeners
- who are growing organic fruits and vegetables

What we want:

- The direct contact between producer and consumer
- Guaranteed regional origin
- Short way of transport, no intermediate trade

What we offer:

- Organic fruits and vegetables
- Seasonal und fresh.
- To secure a wide product range, a small amount of fruits sourced from outside the business is used

How we sell our products:

- Home delivery service (Box scheme)
- Different box types to choose from (size, products)
- The combination of products depends on the seasonal availability

Organic meat

Who we are:

- About 100 farmers combined in a producer co-operation
- selling their products together

What we want:

- Better marketing opportunities from grouping the products
- The breeders supervision on selling of their animals
- Promotion of the regional environmental development

What we offer:

- Meat from your region
- Beef, veal, pork and lamb
- from organic animal husbandry

How we sell our products:

- Supermarkets (70%)
- Regional butcher stores
- Consumer co-operatives in the region

Organic cereals

Who we are:

- One of the oldest and better known co-operatives
- growing organic cereals

What we want:

- Support the local economy
- Direct contact with consumers
- Consumer information
- Protection of natural resources

What we offer:

- Pasta, flour, legumes and cereals
- from selected first quality raw materials

How we sell our products:

- Large retailer chains
- Specialised shops
- Via own organic restaurants

Organic milk

Who we are:

- A co-operative of 15 farmers
- which keeps milk cattle in your region
- and sells the products together

What we want:

- Natural products with high quality
- Closeness to the consumer
- Regional awareness
- Additional takings from selling cheese outside the region

What we offer:

- Milk, cheese, curd cheese, yoghurt
- from organic production and organic animal husbandry

How we sell our products:

- Wholesalers in the region
- Organic shops and butchers
- Schools
- Nationally: Organic cheese to wholesalers

Appendix 4. The meta codebook

OMIaRD
SWP 4.3
P9, P2, P10 December 2002
Meta-Codebook

1 ASSOCIATIONS WITH ORGANIC CONCEPT

- PRODUCTS (description of organic products and associated products)
  - Products types & categories (association regarding organic products, e.g. soya, cereal, vegetables,…)
  - Attributes of products (association regarding organic product attributes, e.g. no chemical additives, regional origin, seasonal products, declared origin, vivid, expensive, not durable, healthy…)
  - Production techniques (description of production techniques, e.g. natural, appropriate animal husbandry, lower profitability, no pesticides…)
- PEOPLE (description of consumers and non-consumers)
  - Consumers (statement concerning the image of organic consumers, e.g. rich people, environmentally conscious people, ill people, health-oriented consumers, ethical people, young people, urban people, people involved in social movements…)
  - Non- consumers (statements concerning the image of non-organic consumers, e.g. people with lower income, people who do not trust organic, lack of interest…)
  - Actors (statement concerning the image of people who act – influence – in the organic world e.g. politicians, celebrities, NGO's, institutions, associations…)
- CHARACTERISTIC OF ORGANIC CONSUMPTION (statements concerning aspects of behaviour and circumstances which may have an impact on organic purchase and consumption, e.g. habits-eating/buying behaviour, readiness to invest, time and effort…)
- INFORMATION/LACK OF INFORMATION (statements concerning educational aspects, information, lack of information, consumer awareness, knowledge of organic products…)

2 TRUST

- TRUST-BUILDERS FOR ORGANIC QUALITY (association which rely on trust factors)
  - Distribution channels (statement with regard to the distribution of organic products, e.g. farmers, supermarket, delivery service, organic shops…)
  - Certification (statement with regard to the certification of organic products)
  - Size of firm (statement with regard to the size of firm or farm)
  - Traceability of origin (statement about traceability of origin, e.g. easy identification of farm, region, country…)
  - Others (statement with regard to others trust factors, e.g. labels, store brands…)
- TRUST-IMPEDIMENTS FOR ORGANIC QUALITY (associations which rely on factors that restrain trust)
  - Distribution channels (statement with regard to the distribution of organic products, e.g. farmers, supermarket, delivery service, organic shops…)
  - Certification (statement with regard to the lack of certification of organic products)
  - Size of firm (statement with regard to the size of firm or farm)

- ♦ Others (statement with regard to others trust impediments factors, e.g. labels, store brands…)

3 ORIGIN

- PRO-REGIONALITY (arguments highlighting the importance of the regional origin of organic products, e.g. insight into farming, avoid long transport, personal contact with farmers, protecting the environment…)
- COUNTER-REGIONALITY (arguments highlighting the reasons why the regional origin is not important, e.g. uniform standard guarantee organic, restricted variety of organic products – not regional available/only seasonal availability,.......)
- PRODUCT-SPECIFIC IMPORTANCE (arguments regarding to product categories where origin is particularly important, e.g. meat products…, arguments regarding to specific products where origin is not at all important, e.g. dried food, processed food,.....)
- DEFINITION OF REGIONALITY (Participants definition about what comprises a ”region” or about what they perceive as ”local”, e.g. own province, own country, short distance up to 50 km, parts of own province and neighbouring country,......)
- COUNTRY IMAGES (statements about countries/products towards which participants do have negative associations regarding organic products, e.g. tomatoes from the Netherlands, strawberries from Spain, Morocco, apples from New Zealand…, statements about countries/products towards which participants do have positive associations, e.g. cheese from France, meat from Austria, chocolate from Switzerland…)

4 OMIS

- FACTOR OF SUCCESS
  - ♦ Distribution channels (Statements regarding the assessment, desires and importance of different ways of distribution, e.g. delivery service, supermarkets, regional butchers, schools, organic restaurants, speciality shops, no intermediary, internet, farmers markets, educational institutions…) in this case: +: e.g. I prefer the delivery of organic vegetables and fruits to my house because it’s convenient
  - ♦ Organisational form (Statements regarding the assessment, desires and importance of different organisational forms of OMI’s, e.g. legal status, small size, large size…) in this case: +: I like small-sized farmers because I have more trust in them
  - ♦ Advertising and Promotion (Statements in respect to different ways of advertising and promotion. e.g. logo, Media - TV, radio. Internet, celebrities …- , flyers, posters free samples, events ….)
  - ♦ Product attributes (Statements concerning the different aspects of products except of range. e.g. packaging, assortment, seasonal products, processed products, premium quality - better taste, fully ripened, durable, fresh -, only declared additional purchases…)

- Product range (Statements concerning the aspects of how the OMI's should develop and present their product range - durable products, processed products…)
- Direct customer relations (e.g. personal contact, farm visits, incentives for regular customers…)
- Payment options (e.g. Bank withdrawal, debit card, credit card…)
- Price aspects (e.g. a bit more expensive than supermarkets, 20% more, 10% more, same prices…)
- Information (e.g. detailed information on the product, region of origin, producer, date of harvesting…)
- Regional Impact of OMI (e.g. to support local economy and territory, to promote local and typical products, to recover traditional products…)
  - Ecological (statements concerning the ecological impact of OMI on the region they're located at (saving the environment for the future generations etc)
  - Economical (statements concerning the impact of OMI's on the economical situation in the region, e.g. economic independence in case of global food crisis, creation of new jobs…)
  - Social
- Product specific success factors (e.g. specific expectations and wishes of the consumer concerning MEAT, CEREALS, DAIRY PRODUCTS and FRUUITS AND VEGETABLES),
- Chances for foreign OMIs (when consumers are willing to buy foreign organic products, e.g. attractive regions, product specific arguments, distribution,.....)
- Others

- WEAKNESSES
  - Distribution channels (Statements regarding the assessment, desires and importance of different ways of distribution, e.g. delivery service, supermarkets, regional butchers, schools, organic restaurants, speciality shops, no intermediary, internet, farmers markets, educational institutions…) in this case: - I don' like the deliver of fruits to my house because I want to see them before I buy them.- arguments!
  - Organisational form (Statements regarding the assessment, desires and importance of different organisational forms of OMI's, e.g. legal status, small size, large size…) in this case: - For me small sized farmers don't have the variety that big sized farmers have. - arguments!
  - Advertising and Promotion (Statements in respect to different ways of advertising and promotion, e.g. logo, Media - TV, radio. Internet, celebrities …- , flyers, posters free samples, events ….)
  - Product attributes (Statements concerning the different aspects of products except of range. e.g. packaging, assortment, seasonal products, processed products, premium quality - better taste, fully ripened, durable, fresh -, only declared additional purchases…)
  - Product range (Statements concerning the aspects of how the OMI's should develop and present their product range - durable products, processed products…)
  - Direct customer relations (e.g. personal contact, farm visits, incentives for regular customers…)

- Payment options (e.g. Bank withdrawal, debit card, credit card…)
- Price aspects (e.g. a bit more expensive than supermarkets, 20% more, 10% more, same prices…)
- Information (e.g. detailed information on the product, region of origin, producer, date of harvesting…)
- Product specific weakness (e.g. specific weakness from consumer point of view concerning MEAT, CEREALS, DAIRY PRODUCTS and FRUUITS AND VEGETABLES)
- Risks for foreign OMIs (when consumers are not willing to buy foreign organic products, e.g. unattractive regions, product specific arguments, distribution,.....)
- Others

5 MOTIVES & BARRIERS FOR BUYING ORGANIC PRODUCTS

- MOTIVES (possible reasons for a positive development)
  - Political factors (e.g. political intervention by the government, Green Party in power…)
  - Environmental factors (e.g. global warming, traffic and transport problems…)
  - Socio-economic factors (e.g. recollection on essential things, scandals in conventional food sector, GM-Food is being used in the conventional sector…)
  - Individual factors (e.g. own-family health, taste of organic products is better…)
  - Technical factors (e.g. new production techniques for organic, new products, new brands, new distribution channels…)
  - Others
- BARRIERS (possible reasons for a negative development)
  - Political factors (e.g. no political intervention by the government…)
  - Environmental factors (e.g. soil is poisoned therefore organic production is not possible…)
  - Socio-economic factors (e.g. missing health awareness, general denial of organic, scandals in organic farming, conventional food sector is manipulative, price is too high, lack of information…)
  - Individual factors (e.g. habit of buying conventional food, visually more attracted to conventional food…)
  - Technical factors (e.g. new production techniques for conventional…)
  - Others

Appendix 5. Instructions for the structure of the report

OMIaRD
Focus groups
P9 **December 02**
Structure of the focus group reports - final -

Country Report (8x: AT, CH, DE, DK, FI, FR, IT, UK)

General guideline:

When analysing try to elicit what stands behind the panellists statements. What do they mean with what they are saying?

In each chapter describe what panellist are saying and then work on the following questions:

1. What does it mean for the “world of organic” and its actors?
2. Which implications can be derived for organic marketing?

Including direct supporting quotation.

Structure of the focus group reports - final -

Introductory part: Information about date, place, participants and any special features of the focus groups

1 Influences and characteristics of organic food, food consumption and food purchase

Information on aspects of behaviour and circumstances or actors who influence the organic food consumption

1.1 Individual determinants
[Differentiate between the rational (cognitive) and the emotional (affective) level, based on verbatims.]

1.2 External determinants
[social, cultural, economical, etc.]

2 Motives an barriers and their impact on organic food purchase

[In general and related to the 4 OMI product groups.]

3.1 Image of organic products
[including attitude, knowledge, prejudices]

3.2 Actual and potential motives

3.3 Actual and potential barriers
[Use especially here the coding information on Trust.]

4 Meaning of regional origin and its impact on organic food purchase

[In general and related to the 4 OMI product groups.]

4.1 Significance of regional origin for organic and conventional products

4.2 Acceptance of OMIs from other/foreign region

5 Consumer needs

[Differentiate between the rational and the emotional level.]

5.1 General
5.2 Price
5.3 Product
5.4 Place
5.5 Promotion
[Understanding and possibilities for improvement from a consumers perspective]

6 Discussion

[Recommendations for marketing implications and the most important or most surprising results.]

OMI Report (4x: AT, FR, IT, UK)

Introductory part: Information about date, place, participants and any special features of the focus groups

1 Influences and characteristics of organic food, food consumption and food purchase
Information on aspects of behaviour and circumstances or actors who influence the organic food consumption

1.1 Individual determinants
[Differentiate between the rational (cognitive) and the emotional (affective) level, based on verbatims.]
1.2 External determinants
[social, cultural, economical, etc.]

2 Motives an barriers and their impact on organic food purchase
[In general and related to the 4 OMI product groups.]

3.1 Image of organic products
[including attitude, knowledge, prejudices]
3.2 Actual and potential motives
3.3 Actual and potential barriers
[Use especially here the coding information on Trust.]

3 Meaning of regional origin and its impact on organic food purchase

4 OMI

4.1 Introduction to OMI $_{A, B, C}$, or $_{D}$
4.2 Consumers' perception of OMI $_{A, B, C}$, or $_{D}$
4.2.1 Consumers with OMI recognition
4.2.1.1 Image
4.2.1.2 Strengths
4.2.1.3 Weaknesses
4.2.2 Consumers without OMI recognition
4.2.2.1 Image
4.2.2.2 Strengths
4.2.2.3 Weaknesses
4.2.3 Influence on the region
4.3 Consumer needs
[Differentiate between the rational and the emotional level.]
4.3.1 Price
4.3.2 Product
4.3.3 Place

4.3.4 Promotion

[Understanding and possibilities for improvement from a consumers perspective]

5 Conclusion

[Recommendations for marketing implications and the three most important or most surprising results.]

[Use verbatim quotations. Per chapter a few illustrating ones.]

Appendix 6. Country and product images

The country images relating to organic products reflected, first, an idea about long distances causing environmental load in the form of traffic, and secondly, what we could characterise as cultural stereotypes concerning food production and the state of environmental issues in different parts of the world. On occasion, also political factors had an influence. In the following, the country images are listed in alphabetical order. Also larger geographical areas are included in case they were discussed (e.g., Central Europe). Here we have to emphasise that it is not totally possible to differentiate between ”organic” and ”conventional” images of different countries.

Countries that were mentioned in a negative or suspicious tone included Belgium (unspecified suspicion), China (unspecified suspicion), England (suspicions relating especially to meat), Estonia (environmental concerns and health concerns relating to a dangerous virus spread by wild animals to forest berries), Germany (suspicions relating to pollution from traffic and industry and the recent scandal with chickens fed with polluted fodder), Israel (unspecified suspicions and political reasons for boycotting), Italy (suspicions relating to environmental degradation caused by traffic), the Netherlands (high levels of pesticides in vegetables), New Zealand (long distance, from which the concept of “organic” suffers), Russia (unspecified suspicion), Spain (unspecified suspicions, environmental pollution), Thailand (unspecified suspicion), Ukraine (potential radioactivity because of the Chernobyl accident) and Vietnam (fields possibly polluted by napalm). In addition, as mentioned above, Central Europe was often mentioned as a larger geographical region to be avoided because of high levels of pollution due to traffic, industry and large population density. Also Eastern Europe was mentioned as an area to be avoided.

Some specific foreign products to be avoided or at least raising concerns were also mentioned. These included milk products (there is no sense transporting milk products from abroad), conventional exotic fruits and vegetables in general (“poisons”), conventional tomatoes (poor taste, glazing agents, unspecified concern), conventional sweet peppers (poor taste and unspecified concern), conventional apples (“preservatives”), organic apples (“poor taste”), cookies and cakes of foreign origin in general (unspecified concern), without specifying the country of origin. “Unfair” coffee and bananas were also mentioned without country specifications (however, because of a television programme on ethical and environmental problems with the production of fair trade bananas in Central America shown shortly before the discussions, the comments on fair trade bananas were not entirely positive).

Products with a certain country of origin to be avoided included Estonian blueberries and mushrooms (because of deterioration during transport, concern about pollution and the virus mentioned above), German wine (wine production in Europe in general was seen as problematic due to environmental pollution), turkey (unspecified) and herb teas (unspecified), British meat (BSE), Hungarian olive oil (olive oil should come from France or Spain), Israeli carrots (poor looks and taste), Moroccan oranges (preference for EU region oranges), New Zealand kiwi fruits (long distance), Russian organic potato or organic meat (unspecified), Spanish sweet peppers, tomatoes and strawberries (see Spain above), Ukrainian maize and buckwheat (Chernobyl pollution), Uruguayan millet (distance), US products (not pure) and Vietnamese rice (not pure).

An example of how a vague memory of some accident or environmental catastrophe may influence consumers’ images of certain countries is given below:

> “Sometimes I wonder when I see organic or other products from Spain, I remember that there was some place, some emissions released in a river. I can’t remember if it was quicksilver or radioactive or what it was, it was so long ago, I’ve lost the details. But every time I see a Spanish sweet pepper, I wonder…” (F, RU, 2:514–520)

On the other hand, foreign products with a positive (country) image were also mentioned. These included meat from Brazil, New Zealand and Argentina, olive oil from France or Spain, pasta from Italy (even if imported pasta also invoked negative arguments relating to transport distances) and Estonian pike-perch (rather than Finnish farmed Arctic char which comes from farther off). Nordic countries in general had quite a positive image (however, Denmark was considered to be “closer to Europe”). In addition, fair trade and organic coffee, fair trade bananas (however, evoking also negative arguments, as explained above) and organic tea were mentioned as good foreign products also from the point of view of global social justice. Also foreign cheeses were mentioned to be good even if generally importing milk products was deemed ridiculous.

In addition, there are many products which cannot be produced in Finland because of climate conditions. Many of the discussants said they buy these without much consideration to the country of origin. These included fruits and vegetables in general, (organic) bananas, organic lemons, organic ketchup, (organic) coffee, organic tea, (organic) rice, soy, organic spaghetti, pulses, organic dried fruits, nuts, wine and olives. On the other hand, some discussants maintained that seasonality should be respected and asked why it is that people want to eat, e.g., strawberries all year round.

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