

The Perception of Polish organic food consumer

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Key words: consumer, organic food, opinion on food, purchase motives, development barriers

Abstract:

This paper presents the problems concerning the organic food demand in Poland. It indicates the reasons for such small interest in this kind of food, the main motives of purchase, and the barriers of market development. It also shows the ways of developing the organic food market development.

Introduction:

The article presents the results of the survey conducted in 2004 among 900 people coming from two regions of Poland: Silesia and Wielkopolska. Among the responders were mainly people with higher (43 %) and secondary (35 %) education, 51 % of them had households consisting of 3 or 4 persons, mostly having 1 or 2 children, 71 % of them were households with middle and higher incomes. The survey was aimed at defining of the growth possibilities of the Polish organic food market in future and indicating the main barriers of the development.

Food safety:

The survey shows that one of the factors to increase the organic food demand is the growth of health risks in food. About 60% of the responders claim that in recent years the health risk growth of food has occurred. The perspectives of the growth of the organic market are firmly connected to the opinion on food quality. Weak demand growth is a result of the consumers' good opinion on Polish food quality, as farmers have only been using small amounts of chemical fertilisers so far. A very good opinion on Polish food was claimed by 21% of the responders, and the good one – by about 53 %. Nearly 72 % of the responders answered that the organic food market is the safest kind of food market. Therefore 68 % of the responders believe that it has the greatest chance of development, 19 % that the conventional one and 13 % - that GMO one. The willingness of the increase of the organic food consumption was declared by 80 % of them, conventional – 16 % and GMO – 4 %.

Distribution of the answers in the group of questions, which were aimed at knowledge in the area of organic food, allows to conclude that the responders have basic and selective information on this subject. This situation indicates the necessity of the ecological education growth in future. Although over 1/3 of them could correctly define organic food, 65 % still did not know who certifies this kind of food.

Consumer's insufficient knowledge of organic food indication and the lack of market clarity do not let define the shares of consumers with different purchase frequency. The survey shows that 17 % of the responders purchase organic food regularly (every day, once a week), 48 % sometimes (once a month) and 34 % occasionally, while 33 % of them declared that they had never bought organic food

The motives of organic food purchase:

The Polish organic food market reveals the features of the immature market which symptoms are low demand, low premium acceptance and low level of the indication knowledge (Łuczka-Bakuła 1998). It has great potential both on the supply and the

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demand side, which has not been sufficiently used yet. One of the most important factors of the market growth is the level of the consumer environmental awareness. The state of awareness is presented mostly by the number of the motives of organic food purchase, among which the health care (76 %) dominates while the others – in comparison to another countries – play incommensurably less significant role (Alvensleben 1998, Cunnigham 2001).

The barriers of market development:

In the responders' opinion, one of the organic food market weaknesses is the not-satisfying availability of it. This view was expressed by 43 % of the responders. Meat and its products, dairy products, fruit and vegetables constitute the group of products which the responders wished to consume more (Figure 1).

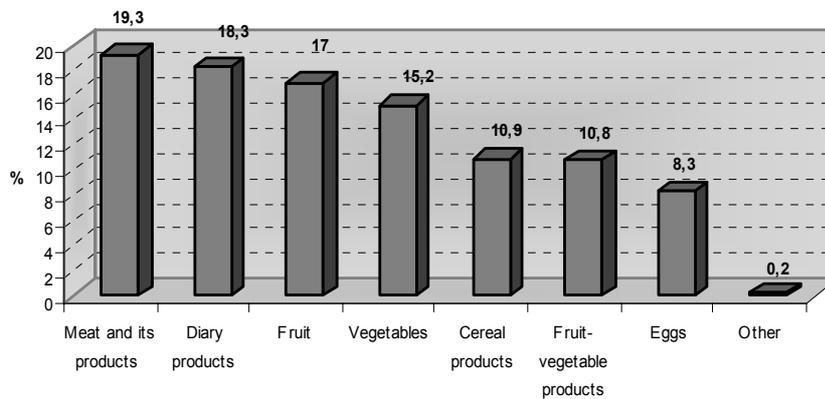


Figure 1. Which of the organic products would you buy if the offer was wider?

Source: Own elaboration

The other barrier to market growth is the relatively high organic food price. This opinion was expressed by 72 % of the responders in the survey. Their willingness to accept the premium for organic food was quite low (Richter 2002). Almost half of the responders could accept the premium not higher than 10 %, while 3 % of the responders only were willing to accept the premium of 26 % and more (Figure 2).

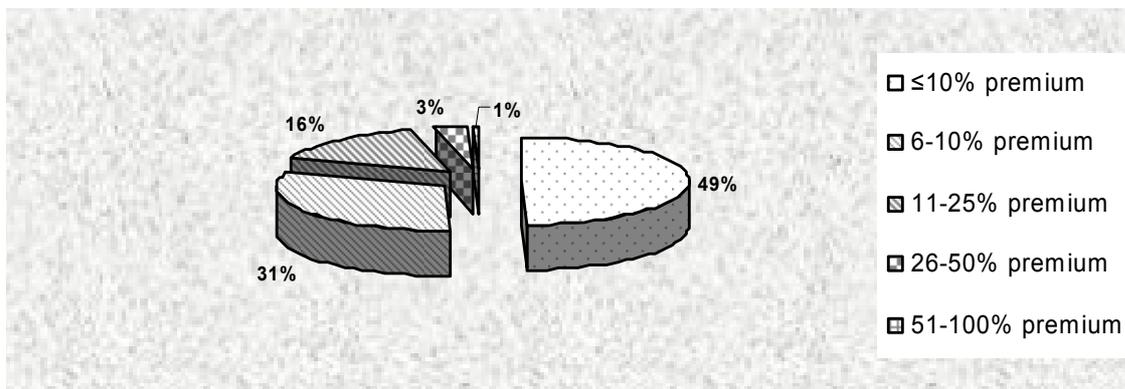


Figure 2. Willingness to pay a premium for organic food

Source: Own elaboration

The future growth of the organic food market strongly connects with the organic food assortment improvement, income increase and decrease of the price level. Low diversity of Polish organic products, among which are mainly fresh fruit and vegetables, their products and cereal products, is also a significant reason for such a situation on the demand side.

Organic food is mainly offered in indirect sale (68 %) which is preferred by consumers to the direct sale. In this kind of sale the most significant are the health food shops (36 % of the responders purchase there) characteristic for little space, in which, except the organic food, one can purchase dietetic products and functional food. The other significant kind of indirect sales are supermarkets, where 17 % of the responders buy their organic products. For two years, successively, organic products have been introduced to the TESCO chain, but their assortment is still insignificant and is limited mainly to fruit and vegetables

Conclusions:

The future organic food market development is conditioned by the demand growth which mainly depends on the consumers' opinion on non-organic food quality, and further on knowledge on organic food indication, its credibility, price level and incomes. Low level of demand in the past mainly came from the good and very good opinion on Polish non-organic food connected with low use of chemicals in agriculture. However, one can foresee that its growth will take place together with the acceleration of the concentration process in agriculture, which may lead to the organic food interest growth and increase the development perspectives of the organic food market in Poland. The other significant element of development is the influence on demand among consumers who at present occasionally purchase organic food. It indicates the need to conduct the investigation in this market segment to recognise the consumers' expectations, preferences and knowledge.

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