

## **A REVIEW ON CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF ORGANICALLY PRODUCED RED MEAT AND MEAT QUALITY**

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### **-Abstract-**

In this study consumer perception of organically produced meat and meat quality is reviewed and the relationship between quality expectation and quality experience and its implications for consumer satisfaction is addressed.

Even in the developing countries, food quality is a very subjective and dynamic concept, and the perception of meat quality is changing very rapidly. Consumers today pay more attention to credence quality attributes like safety, healthiness, convenience, locality, ethical factors, organically produced and so on.

**Key words:** *consumer, consumption, organic food, meat quality*

**JEL Classification:** M1, M2

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

A growing number of consumers, and especially those dealing with chronic illness, are switching to organic food. A key motivation for consumers doing this is a simple belief that it's better for them. Official food agencies around the world are unanimous in claiming there is no evidence of a nutritional difference. Yet a more careful and thorough review of the science comparing organic and non-organic food reveals that, collectively, the available evidence does indeed support

the consumer belief and claims by the organic industry that their food is safer, more nutritious, and better for human being than non-organic food.

It is important to analyse which parameters influence demand for products in order to introduce a product successfully (Bryhni et al., 2002:1). Quality is an important factor in a highly competitive market (Du and Sun, 2005:2). Consumers subjectively evaluate quality, and it has become increasingly important to link quality of food with consumer demands, expectations, and desires (Bryhni et al., 2002:1). The relationship between quality perceptions of consumers and physical product and process attributes requires knowledge of the quality evaluation of the consumers. Therefore, in this study consumer perception of organically produced meat and meat quality is reviewed and the relationship between quality expectation and quality experience and its implications for consumer satisfaction is addressed.

## **2. METHODS**

The Total Food Quality Model (TFQM) is used as a comprehensive model for analyzing the process of food quality perception by the consumer (Grunert and Baadsgaard, 1996:3). It serves as a frame of reference for analyzing the way in which consumers form expectations about the quality of meat based on their own experience.

Some quality characteristics cannot be evaluated before the purchase of an organically produced product. In the economics-of-information literature, these are often referred to as experience characteristics. In the case of beef, these are primarily characteristics such as the taste, tenderness, and juiciness of the product, but also its convenience. Only after the purchase of the good, the consumer can experience the quality of the product with respect to these dimensions (Grunert, 1997:4).

Before a purchase, the model shows how quality expectations are formed by consumers based on quality cues that are present in the shopping situation. It distinguishes two types of quality cues: intrinsic quality cues and extrinsic quality cues.

Intrinsic quality cues comprise the physical characteristics of a product such as cut, colour, and visible fat content of the meat. Extrinsic quality cues refer to everything else. The extrinsic quality cues investigated will be different types of information about the agricultural production system from which the products originate, including intensive indoor production, extensive outdoor production,

organic production, distribution, outlet, price, brand name, and label etc (Grunert, 2002:5).

Only cues that consumers perceive can have an influence on the formation of quality expectations. Quality expectations, in turn, will only influence purchase decision to the degree that they are salient in the shopping situation, which may depend on time pressure, the presentation of the product in the store, information available on the product package, and individual differences in attitudes towards agricultural production systems and their salience.

### **3. RESULTS**

The relationship between quality perceptions of consumers and physical product and process attributes is affected by the following factors:

#### **3.1 Cue Usage**

The perceived quality of food products has been found to comprise sensory, health, convenience and process dimensions used evaluation via pictures of beef and written information to study the consumers' usage of intrinsic and extrinsic quality cues in four European countries, Germany, France, Spain and the UK (Grunert, 1997:4). Quality cues are what the consumer observes, and quality attributes are what the consumer wants. Quality cues are important only to the extent that they act as consumer perceived indicators for attributes. Quality cues may be intrinsic or extrinsic to the product. Quality attributes may be experienced or have to be inferred (Steenkamp, 1990:6).

Consumers tend to systematically disappoint themselves in that they infer high eating quality from low amounts of fat. This effect is called "fat paradox" in the literature, and it is very prevalent in relation to beef. An explanation of this phenomenon is that fat as a cue is dysfunctional, because its objective relationship to relevant quality dimensions such as tenderness and taste is the opposite of what consumers assume (Grunert, 2002:5).

Consumer studies distinguish between quality expectations and quality performance (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1996:7). At the point of purchase the consumer forms an impression about the expected product quality of alternative food products and accordingly decides which product to buy. It is generally acknowledged that consumers' expectations about quality are based on perceptions of quality cues. Quality cues are any informational stimuli that can be ascertained through the senses prior to consumption, and, according to the

consumer, have predictive validity for the product's quality performance upon consumption. In the case of fresh meat, place of purchase and colour are among the more important quality cues, as confirmed in European consumer surveys (Glitsch, 2000:8). These cues are essentially subjective.

### **3.1 Labels and brands**

Unbranded products such as fresh beef make it more difficult for the consumer to form quality expectations. Quality labels can give consumers another means of inferring experience and credence characteristics of food products (Grunert, 2002:5).

Organic and free-range logos increase consumer expectation of quality and healthiness. Consumers perceive the eating quality of meat as higher when it carries an organic or free-range label, provided that the eating quality does not depart too much from consumers' expectations (Bredahl and Scholderer, 2004:9).

Consumers infer mostly positive inferences from the label 'organic', and these refer not only to concern for the environment and health but also to animal welfare and better taste. From a consumer perspective, brands are important quality cues and make it easier to infer quality. Traceability systems, branding and labelling can help reduce consumer's dependence on credence factors. Yet, brand name has little relevance for most consumers (Bredahl and Poulsen, 2002:10).

The research conducted by Glitsch (2000:8) showed that in the case of meat and meat products, the place of purchase, whether butcher's shop or supermarket, is regarded by consumers (even in those countries where butcher's shops have hardly any importance) as a primary indicator, both of safety and eating quality. Price is regarded as a much less important indicator. Even in those countries like Sweden, where independent butcher's shops are comparatively rare, and their importance as a cue for quality equals that of price. Colour and, to a lesser extent, countries of origin are, together with place of purchase, also among the first-ranked indicators used by consumers to infer eating quality. In most countries in Europe, producer labels and brands have only minor importance as indicators for quality. Except for beef in Sweden and chicken in Germany, this quality cue is regarded as less important than the place of purchase.

### **3.2 Healthiness**

The consumer is not only interested in the sensory or eating quality, but also in issues like animal welfare, environmentally friendly production and, in particular in the case of beef, in the safety of the meat. Among the more important safety

concerns are the use of hormones and antibiotics in animal rearing, and the presence of some diseases. The safety of a meat product may be seen either as an eating quality attributes (EQA), since the consumer may be immediately exposed to any risk after consumption, or as credence quality attributes (CQA) if potential health effects are long term. Within the group of credence quality attributes we will distinguish accordingly between ethical and safety/health credence quality attributes. The distinction is important because food safety and health issues are of importance for the well-being of the consumer, while ethical issues are more important for the well-feeling of the consumer.

A comprehensive Pan-European study of consumer perceptions of healthiness of different food groups has been conducted. Overall, 14331 subjects completed a face-to-face interviews. Every second European defined a healthy diet as containing low amounts of fat. Approximately a fifth of all the EU-15 countries defined a healthy diet as containing less red meat (Martines-Gonzales et al., 2000:11). The negative health image of red meat was subject to a high degree of regional variation. A study identified three clusters in the data, more or less equivalent to northern, central and southern EU-15. Consumers from northern Europe were least critical about healthiness of red meat, and consumers from the south were most critical. Consumers make use of cues for subjective assessments of healthiness of organic red meat products. In general, consumers have problems in putting these cues into words, and they can only state a few cues like the amount of visible fat, the colour of the meat, the degree of processing, cut, i.e. intrinsic cues that can be verified before the purchase.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The fact that consumers associate organic production not only with good health, animal welfare and concern for the environment, but also with good taste means that the characteristic 'organic' is no longer only a credence characteristic, but is also partly an experience characteristic, where expectations can be confirmed or disconfirmed after the purchase. Where consumers have (perhaps unrealistic) expectations about the better taste of organic products, a disconfirmation of this expectation raises another potential barrier to organic demand. Many consumer surveys in several European Union clearly demonstrate that consumers not only care about eating quality but also other quality attributes such as product safety (free from diseases), animal welfare, ecological production methods, or the presence of residues or additives such as hormones or antibiotics used in animal production. Finally, food quality is a very subjective and dynamic concept, and the

perception of meat quality is changing fast. Consumers today pay more attention to credence quality attributes like safety, healthiness, convenience, locality, ethical factors organically produced, etc.

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