

THE ANALYSIS OF ECOLOGIC PRODUCTS CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER. CASE STUDY.

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Abstract

This research has as objective to encourage the contact and cross-border communication and to facilitate the exchange of information and experience in the production and marketing of the ECO products sector in order to improve the economic and social development of the Romania- Bulgaria cross border area. The study was made on a sample of 273 persons, 139 persons in Calarasi county, Romania and 134 persons in Silistra County, Bulgaria, divided into four age groups. As a research method, the quantitative study was made through the questionnaire, applied face to face by interviewers. The questionnaire consists of 13 questions, including: filter questions, consume behaviour, perceived differences between ECO food and regular food, other aspects. The most important criteria used in choosing the food products are according to the results obtained: aspect, price, taste, preserving content and producer. Regarding the ECO food consumption behaviour. It results that 33.63% of the interviewed persons consume ECO products occasionally and 45.13% more times a week. Among the variants of purchase points where the questioned persons consider they can buy ECO food products, the market represents 43,70% of the answers. It is mentioned that the urban areas where the research was made have many sale markets for traditional ecologic products and their selling price is quite affordable. Also, the traders of ecologic products have crossed sale market – the Romanian traders capitalize their products in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian traders capitalize their products in Romania.

Key words: consumption behaviour, ecologic products, market, quantitative study

INTRODUCTION

The market research shows what people want to buy, consume or use. Usually that means something else than what companies design, produce and sell. It is not enough to examine the needs [1], [8]. The wishes and aspirations of the people must be known. The consumer behaviour research deals with different attitudes in the buying decision (eg, choice of place of purchase, brand loyalty, price awareness and difficult attitudes of the consumer, etc.) [10]. The consumer buying behaviour, as recent field of marketing research, refers to the behaviour of the final consumers, who buy goods and services for personal consumption - individuals and households – by which they satisfy their current requirements and indicate their role in the society [2]. The research problem which was the basis of this market survey is to collect information about the current trends and needs of existing on the food products

market in Romania-Bulgaria cross border area and especially about the attitude toward these products, which form the basis for the future collaboration initiatives with the traders and commercial changes in this area. In order to help achieve this objective, a number of aspects were taken into account, such as: creation of a permanent communication infrastructure for specialists, producers and other interested persons, in the sector of organic products production and sale, under the form of a network of cross-border cooperation for the organic agriculture; development of joint initiatives for the harmonious development of the technical and managerial capacity of organic products production and sale in Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area; increase of the flow of producers and products in the sector of organic agriculture, through a higher interaction between producers and consumers in the cross border area.

The offer in the market of organic food makes

reference to two product categories [3]: biological-organic products resulted by strictly observing some technologies required for obtaining these products; products with "organic image" considered intermediate that interfere between the biological-ecological food products and current food products (in these products, also farm products or the products of the farmer can fit). In this case the product must meet the following three cumulative conditions [4], [6]: the product to be obtained in the farm; the ingredients transformation of this product must also come from the farm; to be a small-scale manufacturing way (by practicing a specific tradition in preparing the product).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was made on a sample of 273 persons, 139 persons in Romania and 134 persons in Bulgaria, divided into four age groups. All respondents reside in urban areas. As a research method, the quantitative study was made through the questionnaire, applied face to face by interviewers. The questionnaire consists of 13 questions, including: filter questions, consume behaviour, perceived differences between ECO food and regular food, other aspects.

Given the fact that it was proposed to use a sample with a defined structure, in the first part of the questionnaire, the identification question of the filtration characteristics were positioned: gender and age. The second group of questions aimed at identifying the respondents' perceived differences between organic and usual food. In the last part of the questionnaire there are questions on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The research instrument was pre-tested on a sample of 15 people in order to check: the degree of understanding of the questions and the used terms; the degree of coverage of the categories of the closed questions; questions that induce the response that can be interpreted differently by the respondents; redundant questions that require obvious answers obvious.

The questionnaire was pre-tested by applying face to face under the form of a structured

interview adding to the questions included in the questionnaire, clarifying and clarification questions. A special problem was posed by the open question where the respondents needed more time to respond. The difficulty of the question was explained by the fact that the questionnaire addresses a little known field. Given that the objective of the questionnaire was just to verify the respondents' familiarity with the terms of ecological, organic, bio and natural product and with the specific characteristics of these products, the open question was kept with the argument that the difficulty can be overcome if the interview operator insists that the respondent answers or fills in with "I do not know" where this is the reason of the lack of response. The variant "I do not know" is itself a category relevant to the study. Compared to the aspects above mentioned, the paper aimed to analyse the consumption of ECO products in Romania, as well as the perception and the attitude of the consumer based on a statistic survey and questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the language of the population as well as the various advertising messages, the same names of ecological, biological, organic and natural products are used in parallel. In terms of gender, the sample consists of 52.50% women and 47.50% men.

The respondents were selected from the age group 20-50 years old, 24.50% being part of the segment 20-29 years old, 36% of the segment 30-39 years old and 39.50% of the segment 40-49 years old.

The structure on net monthly income of the questioned sample indicates a percent of 25.94% for the income level 1001 – 1500 ron, 6.91% under 1000 ron, 29.49% between 1501-2000 ron, and 24.66% over 2000 ron (Fig. 1).

The most important criteria of selection of food products are according to the obtained results: *aspect, price, taste, contents of preservatives and producer*. That shows the percent of questioned persons for which a certain criterion is important, the aspect is considered an important criterion in selecting

the good products by 65.04% of persons, the price by 52.65%, the taste by 43.81%, the contents of preservatives by 40.27% and the producer by 36.28% of questioned persons.

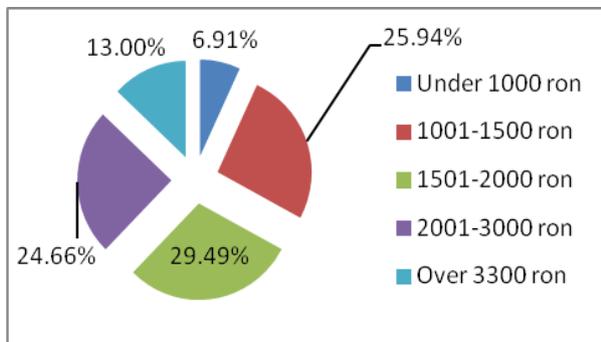


Fig.1.The demographic profile of the respondents: level of net monthly income

The most consumed types of ECO products are fruit, vegetables, drinks, milk and basic products (sugar, flour). About a fourth of the questioned persons verify always if the products purchased are ECO. It results that 33.63% of the interviewed persons consume ECO products occasionally (Figure 2) and 45.13% more times a week (28.32% of 3-4 times a week and 16.81% daily).

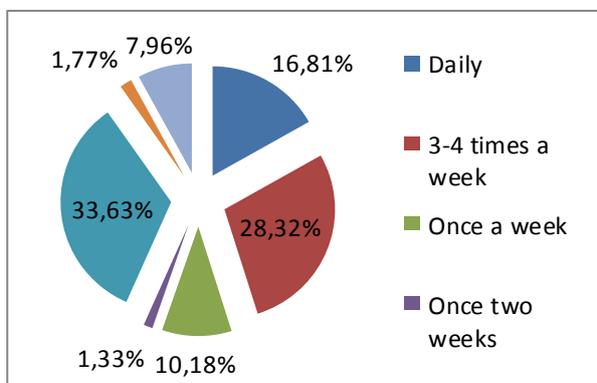


Fig. 2. Frequency of ECO products consumption

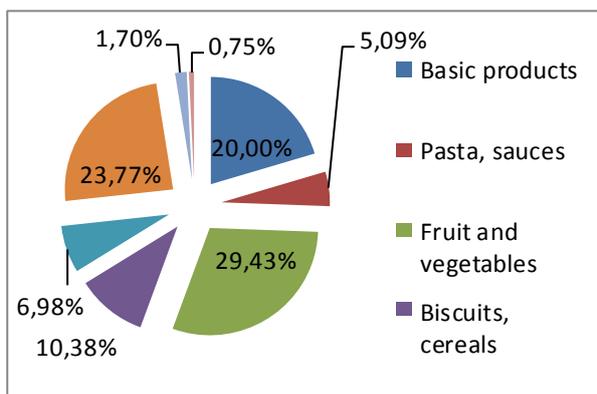


Fig.3. Categories of ECO products

The most consumed ECO food products mentioned are fruit and vegetables (29.43% of products), drinks and milk (23.77% of answers), basic products (sugar, flour, etc. – 20% of answers), biscuits and cereals is 10.38% of answers (Figure 3).

A percent of 42.21% of the answers related to the identification elements of ECO products indicate the label, 33.17% the product aspect and 23.62% the smell. 68.85% of the questioned persons indicated as element of recognising ECO product, the label, 54.10% the aspect and only 38.52% the smell.

Among the variants of purchase points where the questioned persons consider they can buy ECO food products, the market represents 43.70% of the answers, supermarket 14.90% of the answers and natural food stores 21.40% (Fig. 4).

It is remarked the fact that 33.68% of the questioned persons mentioned as difference between the ECO food products and the usual food products the contents of artificial substances, 31.58% mentioned the ECO products quality and the fact that they are healthier and 28.42% the taste.

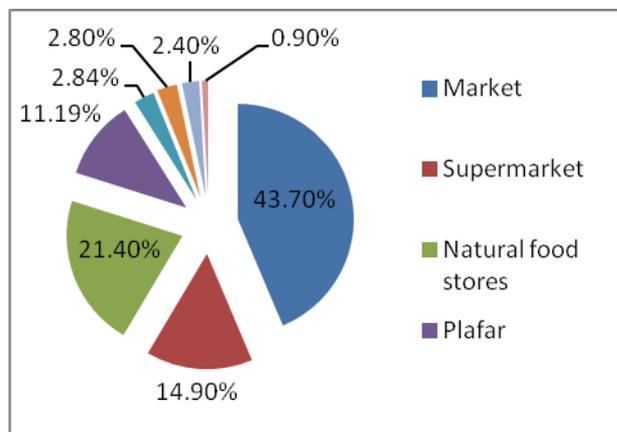


Fig. 4. Purchase points

The results indicate that from the point of view of consumers aspect there is not a clear difference between ECO food products and the usual food products. 45.74% of the respondents answered that the two categories of products have an equal enjoyable aspect. 30.32% said that ECO food products have a less pleasant aspect and 23.94% they look more pleasant. The results are supported by those obtained at the previously analyzed

question where the aspect is mentioned as the difference between the two product categories only by 6.84% of the respondents. The situation is completely different but when people are asked which of the two categories of food is healthier. A clear majority, 82.09% of the respondents believe that organic food is healthier than the usual one.

As regards the opinion on the difference between the usual food products and ECO from the point of view of the taste, 61.65% of the questioned persons consider that ECO products are more tasteful than the usual ones, 22.82% consider them as tasteful as the usual ones, 40.45% consider that there is no difference between BIO and ECO food products. 65.02% of the questioned persons consider that ECO product is the same thing with the natural product. 46.15% of the questioned persons do not know if there are differences between the process of obtaining ecological food products and of obtaining organic products.

CONCLUSIONS

The study results show that it is necessary to better clarify and educate the population regarding the notions of ecological, bio, organic and natural product, given the high percent these terms are used with the aim of creating an image that does not coincide with the reality (products promoted as organic when in fact they should be classified in the categories of natural products, etc.) [5], [7]. Given the fact that the organic products are considered healthier than the usual ones and are appreciated due to their low contents of artificial chemical substances, an opportunity for promotion is to inform people about the standards that define the organic products [9]. It is important that the potential clients can really distinguish ECO products of the others that use this name with promotional purposes without fully observing the necessary conditions. Only 8.8% of the responses regarding the differences between the usual products and the ECO ones indicate the ecological way of obtaining the latter ones. Given the current trend of environment protection, the promotion and awareness of

this aspect can bring more attractive image to the ECO products.

The most mentioned differences between ECO products and the usual ones are: the contents of artificial substances, that are healthier and the taste. Over 80% of the respondents believe that ECO products are healthier than the usual ones. Over 60 % believe that ECO products are more tasteful and they deteriorate more quickly than the usual ones. The results indicate as the main qualities perceived of ECO products that should be considered in the promotion strategies: the low content of artificial chemical substances, the better taste and the better quality and healthier for the body than the usual ones. The label and aspect represent also elements that influence the buying decision and they should be considered in the marketing strategies of the ECO products.

The study results show that it is necessary to better clarify and educate the population regarding the notions of ecological, bio, organic and natural product, given the high percent these terms are used with the aim of creating an image that does not coincide with the reality.

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