

Buying Behaviour of Organic Vegetables Consumers in Croatia

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Summary

The purpose of this research was to examine some aspects of buying behaviour of Croatian organic vegetables consumers, and to explore factors influencing buying frequency. A survey was conducted with 404 respondents in four selling points in Zagreb: two specialized organic food stores, one supermarket, and one city market. The survey results have shown that three most often bought organic vegetables species are: green salad, tomatoes and carrots. Most consumers claim to buy organic vegetables occasionally, and most often in specialized organic food stores. Gender, number of household members, presence of children under 12 years in household, self-rated knowledge about organic vegetables, as well as usual buying place of organic vegetables have strong influence on buying frequency.

Key words

organic food, organic vegetables, buying behaviour, buying frequency

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Introduction

“The increase in production and consumption of organic food is one of the major market trends of our time” (Allen and Kovach, 2000). Possible reason for that is a fact that organic agriculture delivers wider benefits to: the agricultural system, the environment, society, the economy, and institutions (Crucefix, 1998). Especially in poorer countries organic agriculture can contribute to significant socio-economic and ecologically sustainable development (Kilcher, 2007). This way of agricultural production has the potential: “(1) to improve soil fertility, biodiversity and sustainability of agricultural production; (2) to conserve natural resources; (3) to improve agronomic and economic performance; to make yields more stable, especially in risk-prone tropical ecosystems, and to achieve better food quality and food security; (4) to provide access to attractive markets through certified products, and (5) to create new partnerships within the whole value chain as well as to strengthen self-confidence and autonomy of the farmers” (Kilcher, 2005; according to Kilcher, 2007).

Because conventional agricultural production in Croatia has never reached development stage as in more developed countries of the world, and due to the large share of untreated and uncontaminated land, Croatia has great potential for development of organic agricultural production (Pejnović et al., 2012).

Best indicator of this potential is the growth of the organic agricultural land, as well as higher number of organic producers. In 2007 in Croatia 483 producers farmed 7647 ha according to organic principles (Willer and Kilcher, 2009), and seven years later (2014) there were 2194 producers farming 50054 ha of the agricultural land in Croatia (Willer and Lernoud, 2016), i.e., number of producers increased 4.5 times and number of hectares under organic production increased 6.5 times. According to data from Croatian Ministry of Agriculture, the number of producers as well as areas farmed organically continued to grow. So, in 2016 in Croatia 3546 producers farmed 93814 ha according to organic principles (Ministarstvo poljoprivrede/ekološka, 2017). The growth on production side was followed by growth on the sales side. Namely, in 2007 in Croatia retail sales value of organic food was 26 million of Euros (Willer and Kilcher, 2009), and seven years later (2014) it was 99 million of Euros (Willer and Lernoud, 2016), which is an increase of 380%.

Development of organic food market should be observed through all potentials and benefits that organic agricultural production offers. Therefore, to get overall insight into development of organic food market it is necessary to conduct a series of research on different aspects associated with organic food development. From the consumption aspect, it is necessary to examine consumer behaviour, as well as factors influencing that behaviour.

Understanding factors influencing buying behaviour process is crucial for marketing practice (Grier and Deshpande, 2001; Jang et al., 2012; Howard, 1970; Putsis and Srinivasan, 1995; Solomon et al., 2009; Steinhart et al., 2013; Westbrook et al., 1978; according to Khaniwale, 2015). Therefore, increased consumer interest in organic food is followed by many researches on organic food consumer behaviour, as well as factors related to this behaviour (Radman, 2005; Onyango et al., 2007; Arvola et al., 2008; Klöckner and Ohms, 2009; Cerjak et al., 2010; Zakowska-Biemans, 2011; Hjelmar, 2011; Urban et al., 2012; Faletar and Kovačić, 2015; Faletar et al., 2016).

Many studies have found that behaviour of organic food consumers is directly influenced by their socio-demographic profile

(Fotopulous and Krystallis, 2002; Onyango et al., 2007; Radman, 2005; Brčić-Stipčević et al., 2013). According to studies from several countries organic food buying behaviour is influenced by: presence of young children in household (Fotopulous and Krystallis, 2002; Zanolli et al., 2004; Wier et al., 2008), gender of consumers (Onyango et al., 2007; Zamkova and Prokop, 2013; Radman, 2005; Lončarić et al., 2009), education level (Radman, 2005; Brčić-Stipčević and Petljak, 2011), age of consumers (Onyango et al., 2007), place of growing up of consumers (Radman, 2005), and perceived financial status of the family (Brčić-Stipčević et al., 2013).

Apart from socio-demographic factors, researchers have found that organic food behaviour relates to consumers' knowledge about organic food. Namely, lack of knowledge is one of the reasons for consumers not buying organic food (Demeritt, 2002; according to Aertsens et al., 2011). “Brucks (1985) makes a distinction between three categories of consumer knowledge relevant to consumer behaviour: subjective knowledge (i.e. what individuals perceive that they know, also indicated as perceived or self-rated knowledge), objective knowledge (i.e. what an individual knows), and prior experience” (Aertsens et al., 2011). As stated by Flynn and Goldsmith (1999) subjective knowledge is a more important motivation of the behaviour surrounding product buying than objective knowledge. In our research we explored subjective knowledge in organic food although in some future studies it would be important to compare subjective and objective knowledge as those were not explored in Croatia yet.

The purpose of this research is to describe buying behaviour of Croatian organic vegetables consumers, and to examine if socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, subjective knowledge about organic vegetables, and usual buying place of organic vegetables influence buying frequency of organic vegetables (Figure 1).

Organic vegetables are one of the most often bought organic food category in many countries (Stukas et al., 2010; Zamkova and Prokop, 2013; Bozga, 2015), including Croatia (Radman, 2005; Lončarić et al., 2009).

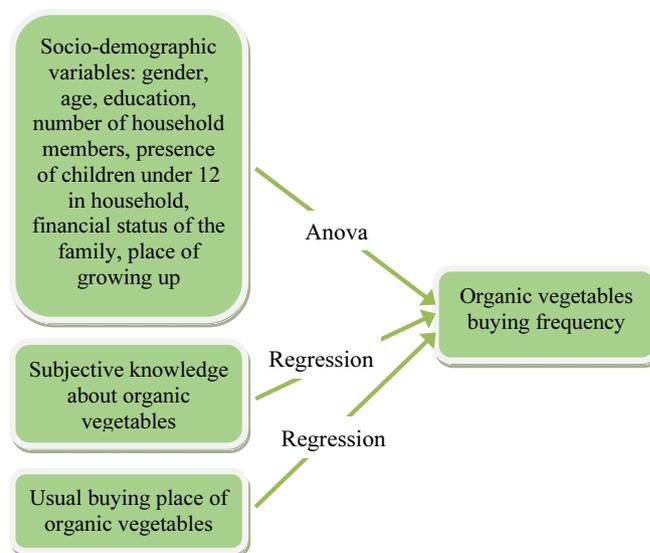


Figure 1. Research model

Study conducted in Zagreb (Radman, 2005) showed that most often bought category of organic food products is vegetables and fruits (bought by 55.6% of respondents), followed by cereals (25.3%) and milk and dairy products (21.6%). Findings of study conducted by Brčić-Stipčević and Petljak in 2011 are similar. Namely, regular buyers of organic food products in Croatia most often buy fresh vegetables and fruits (31.2%), bread and other cereal-based products (29.4%) and milk and dairy products (24.0%) (Brčić-Stipčević and Petljak, 2011). So far, no research on buying behaviour of organic vegetables consumers has been carried out in Croatia.

The objective of this research is to investigate some aspects of buying behaviour of vegetables as the most frequent bought category of organic food products. The importance of such an insight is twofold, scientific and social. In the context of results of this research, it could be a basis for future studies on organic vegetables consumption and could also be useful in production planning, respectively for sales strategies.

Material and methods

Sample choice

A convenience sample choice was made in two steps. First was chosen one selling point for three different types of sales channels offering organically grown vegetables in Zagreb: specialized organic food store, supermarket and city market.

Respondents from each selling channel were chosen using systematic sample procedure. Every second consumer who bought organic vegetables in mentioned channels was asked to participate in the survey. A first consumer was selected randomly. In the case that one consumer did not want to participate in the survey, the first that followed was selected.

Survey included 204 respondents that bought organic vegetables in specialized organic food store, 50 respondents from supermarket, and 150 respondents that bought organically grown vegetables at city market. Thus, a total number of the sample was 404. Consumers obtaining organic vegetables in other selling channels (e.g. community supported agriculture), and outside of the City of Zagreb were not included in the research.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire included questions regarding: consumer buying behaviour, subjective knowledge about organic vegetables, and socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Organic vegetables buying frequency is expressed on a five-point scale (1- very rarely; 5- very often). Usual purchase place of organic vegetables was measured with three offered answers: supermarket, specialized organic food store, city market / directly from producer (in analysis both merged as 'city market'). Data on the most often bought types of organic vegetables was collected with open-ended question. The subjective knowledge about organic vegetables was measured on a five-point scale (1-very low; 5-very high).

Data analysis and processing

To describe sample characteristics and respondents buying behaviour we conducted univariate data analysis (frequency and distribution). The influence of investigated variables on organic vegetables buying frequency (Figure 1) was tested using regression analysis and analysis of variance. In the case of the items measuring organic vegetables buying frequency and subjective knowledge, points 1 and 2 from five-point scale were merged into one answer

as well as points 4 and 5. So from initially five-point scale for the purpose of analysis we created a three-point scale.

Statistical analyses were conducted in SPSS 21, on 5% level of significance. The obtained data are presented in tables.

Results and discussion

Detailed description of the sample is given in the Table 1.

There is a significantly higher share of women in this research as respondents were recruited at the selling places, and as confirmed in previous research (Ranogajec et al., 2013) compared to men, women more frequently do shopping including organic food. Most of the respondents were in the age group between 30 and 45 years. More than half of the respondents (54.5%) have higher education, and 43.3% of respondents have children in their household. Only 5.9% of the respondents perceived financial status of their family as poor or very poor (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the sample

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents		N	%
Gender	female	321	79.5
	male	83	20.5
Age	18 – 29	48	11.9
	30 – 45	186	46.0
	46 – 60	114	28.2
	61 and older	56	13.9
Education	elementary school	8	2.0
	high school	176	43.6
	college / university	181	44.8
	MSc / PhD	39	9.70
Number of household members	1	36	8.0
	2	85	21.0
	3	111	27.5
	4	123	30.4
	5 and more members	49	13.1
Presence of children under 12 in household	yes	175	43.3
	no	229	56.7
Financial status of the family	very good	43	10.6
	good	130	32.2
	average	207	51.2
	bad	23	5.7
	very bad	1	0.2
Place of growing up	rural	72	17.8
	urban	332	82.2

Source: Survey

The survey results revealed that the highest percentage of respondents (48.5%) claims to have moderate knowledge about organic vegetables. More than one third of the respondents (35.9%) claims to have high or very high level of knowledge (Table 2). Similar results were obtained in the study of Faletar and Kovačić (2015) on sample of Croatian students that showed that subjective knowledge about organic food of the highest percentage of respondents was neither low nor high. However, using only one question in this study to measure subjective knowledge is not enough to make sound conclusion of consumers knowledge about organic vegetables. Objective and subjective knowledge should both be assessed for a comprehensive understanding of the role knowledge plays in

Table 2. Subjective knowledge about organic vegetables

Levels of knowledge	N of respondents	% of respondents
very low or low	63	15.6
neither low nor high	196	48.5
high or very high	145	35.9

Source: Survey

Table 3. Organic vegetables buying frequency

Buying frequency	N of respondents	% of respondents
very rarely or rarely	77	19.06
occasionally	177	43.81
often or very often	150	37.13

Source: Survey

consumer buying behaviour (Brucks, 1985; Spreng and Olshavsky, 1990; according to Flynn and Goldsmith, 1999).

The highest percentage of respondents (43.81%) claimed to buy organic vegetables occasionally, followed by respondents who claimed to buy organic vegetables often or very often (37.13%) (Table 3).

The research results have shown that 61.9% (250) of respondents most often buy organic vegetables in specialized organic food stores, 14.1% (57) of respondents buy organic vegetables most often in supermarkets, and 24.0% (97) of respondents at city markets or directly from producers. Our results are not in the line with the results of the previous surveys (Stukas et al., 2010; Zamkova and Prokop, 2013; Bozga, 2015) that have shown supermarkets as place where consumers buy their organic food most often. There are two possible reasons for this discrepancy. One probable reason for this difference is a fact that we surveyed 200 of 400 respondents in specialized organic food stores. However, it could be noted that the share of respondents buying organic vegetables mostly in specialized organic food stores (61.9%) is higher than share of respondents interviewed at this selling point (50%). The other reason for so high share of respondents buying mostly in specialized organic food stores might be a relatively undeveloped offer of organic vegetables in Croatian supermarkets. Therefore, we could presume that clear certification and possibility of buying wider assortment of organic food products at the same retail outlet, make specialized organic food stores as the most desirable place to buy organic vegetables for interviewed respondents.

Respondents claimed to buy 35 types of organic vegetables. The highest percentage of the respondents buy organic green salad (36.13%), followed by respondents that buy organic tomatoes (33.16%), organic carrots (27.72%), and organic leaf beet (23.76%). Other types of organic vegetable have been mentioned by less than 20% of the respondents (Table 4).

Statistical analyses confirmed influence of some socio-demographic factors, subjective knowledge and usual buying place of organic vegetables on buying frequency of organic vegetables.

Women buy organically grown vegetables more frequently than men ($\bar{x} = 2.25$ and $\bar{x} = 1.90$ respectively; Sig.= 0.000) (Table 5). This

Table 4. Types of organic vegetables bought by respondents

Type of organic vegetables	Number of respondents buying that type of organic vegetables	% of respondents buying that type of organic vegetables
green salad	146	36.13
tomato	134	33.16
carrot	112	27.72
leaf beet	96	23.76
zucchini	65	16.08
pepper	53	13.11
potato	45	11.13
cafe	44	10.89
spinach	43	10.64
onion	40	9.90
cucumber	39	9.65
leek	31	7.67
green beans	30	7.42
batata	22	5.44
cabbage	22	5.44
gourd	20	4.95
broccoli	19	4.70
parsley	18	4.45
eggplant	17	4.20
beet	16	3.96
bean	14	3.46
collard	14	3.46
cauliflower	12	2.97
celery	8	1.98
garlic	8	1.98
kohlrabi	6	1.48
legume sprouts	5	1.23
radish	4	0.99
lamb's lettuce	3	0.74
chicory	3	0.74
okra	2	0.49
parsnip	1	0.24
peas	1	0.24
artichoke	1	0.24
arugula	1	0.24

Source: Survey

is expected because women are mainly responsible for food buying as well as for food preparation. It should be noted here that significantly higher share of women has been interviewed during this research. Some previous researches have also shown that women buy organic food products more frequently than men do (Radman, 2005; Onyango et al., 2007; Lončarić et al., 2009; Zamkova and Prokop, 2013). Consumers with five or more household members buy organic vegetables most often ($\bar{x} = 2.51$) followed by consumers that live alone ($\bar{x} = 2.30$), consumers with 3 household members ($\bar{x} = 2.26$), consumers with two household members ($\bar{x} = 2.05$), and consumers with four household members ($\bar{x} = 2.02$) (Table 5). According to these findings it is not possible to give clear interpretation on how number of household members influence organic vegetables buying frequency. Similar as in earlier studies (Fotopoulous and Krystallis, 2002; Zanolli et al., 2004; Wier et al., 2008), we also revealed that consumers with children under 12 years buy organic vegetables more frequently than do respondents without children of that age in their household ($\bar{x} = 2.32$ and $\bar{x} = 2.06$ respectively; Sig.=0.000) (Table 5). Since organic food is generally perceived healthier than conventional food, and parents are usually looking for the best diet for their children, difference

Table 5. The influence of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and usual buying place of organic vegetables on organic vegetables buying frequency

Independent variables	Categories of independent variables	\bar{x} *	ANOVA statistics
Gender	female	2.25	F= 15.666 Sig.= 0.000
	male	1.90	
Age	18 – 29	2.18	F= 1.072 Sig.= 0.361
	30 – 45	2.14	
	46 – 60	2.15	
	61 and older	2.33	
Education	elementary school	2.12	F= 0.022 Sig.= 0.995
	high school	2.18	
	college / university	2.17	
	MSc / Dr.Sc.	2.17	
Number of household members	1	2.30	F= 5.343 Sig.= 0.000
	2	2.05	
	3	2.26	
	4	2.02	
	5 and more members	2.51	
Presence of children under 12 in household	yes	2.32	F= 12.590 Sig.= 0.000
	no	2.06	
Financial status of the family	very good	2.37	F= 2.424 Sig.= 0.060
	good	2.23	
	average	2.08	
	bad	2.39	
	very bad	2.00	
Place of growing up	countryside	2.26	F= 1.143 Sig.= 0,286
	city	2.16	
Usual buying place of organic vegetables	supermarket	1.61	F= 22.294 Sig.= 0.000
	specialized organic food store	2.26	
	city market or directly from producer	2.29	
Dob			F= 1,267 Sig.= 0,285

* three-point scale was used (1- very rarely or rarely; 2- occasionally; 3- often or very often); Source: Survey

in organic vegetables buying frequency in households with and in those without young children is expected.

The influence of: age, financial status of the family, education level and place of growing up, did not significantly influence purchase frequency. Unlike us, Radman (2005) found significant influence of place of growing up of consumers, Onyango et al. (2007) of age of consumers, Radman (2005) and Brčić-Stipčević and Petljak (2011) of education level of consumers and Brčić-Stipčević et al. (2013) of perceived financial status of the family on buying frequency of organic food products.

Consumers claiming to have a better knowledge about organic vegetables buy organic vegetables more often ($\beta = 0.337$; $t = 7.179$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$).

Consumers buying organic vegetables usually at city markets or directly buying from producers buy organic vegetables more frequently than consumers buying organic vegetables usually in specialized organic food stores, or in supermarkets ($\bar{x} = 2.29$, $\bar{x} = 2.26$ and $\bar{x} = 1.61$ respectively; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$) (see Table 5). So, the most frequent organic vegetables buyers remain loyal to the traditional ways of buying, on city market, risking an official guarantee

of organic production in the form of organic label. It could be that for these consumers buying of organic vegetables is a kind of ritual consisting of buying food at the market and direct contact with the farmer. However, consumers buying organic vegetables mainly in supermarkets are less frequent buyers.

Conclusion

Conducted research has shown that the highest percentage of respondents (43.81%) buy organic vegetables occasionally, and most often in specialized organic food stores. Three the most often bought types of organic vegetables are: green salad, tomatoes and carrots.

Consumers claiming to have more knowledge about organic vegetables buy organic vegetables more frequently indicating that these consumers are aware of benefits of organic vegetables. Thus, one way of increasing organic vegetables buying frequency should be promotion of differences between conventionally and organically grown vegetables. One of the activities could be a promotion of organic vegetables consumption as part of a healthy lifestyle.

The significant influence of socio-demographic factors like gender, presence of children under 12 years in household, and number of household members on buying frequency means that organic vegetables buying behaviour is complex process formed by combination of socio-demographic factors. According to our results, an indicator for frequent purchase of organic vegetables is a combination of situation in which woman is responsible for food purchase and presence of young children in household. The number of household members cannot be taken as reliable determinant of buying frequency.

Consumers buying organic vegetables usually at city markets and/or directly from producers, buy organic vegetables most frequently. This might mean that organic vegetables consumers like to have constant direct contact with producers as it increases their trust in organic way of production.

Due to methodological limitations, it is important to mention that firm conclusion about organic vegetables consumers and their buying behaviour is not possible. To get a deeper insight into buying behaviour of organic vegetables consumers on Croatian market, recommendation is to conduct survey using wider sample independent of selling points that would ensure basis for more general conclusion about buying habits of organic vegetables consumers. Additionally, by measuring objective knowledge it would be possible to make clearer conclusion about connection between actual consumers' knowledge about these products and their purchasing behaviour.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate influence of environmental values and psychological factors like motivation and attitudes on buying behaviour of organic vegetables consumers. Relationship between environmental values, which are beliefs about significance, importance and well-being of the natural environment that inform how humans should treat the natural world (Reser and Bentrupperbäumer, 2005) and organic vegetables buying frequency would be interesting to investigate. Positive relationship is expected, because according to Steg et al. (2014) buying behaviour of organic food products is kind of pro-environmental behaviour.

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