



## TURKISH CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION ON ORGANIC FOOD: AN ANALYSIS FOR TURKISH CASE

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose-** The purpose of this research is to perceive and determine the reasons for buying and deterrents for not buying organic products; and to see if modifications in deterrents can increase purchase of organic products making it a value added for the economy.

**Methodology-** As the main aim of the research is to determine Turkish consumers' perception on organic food and figure out whether the modifications on the deterrents can convince the consumers to buy and/or buy more often organic products. As organic food agriculture can be a powerful element of the economy, the feedbacks of non-organic product users were deemed to be a good indicator on the path leading to increased demand and increased production of organic products. A survey composed of 41 questions is sent and this study summarizes the outputs of 556 responses.

**Findings-** The outputs highlight the distrust in certification process as the main deterrent for not buying organic food. The pricing unreliability is also another crucial factor that prevents consumers to consume more.

**Conclusion-** The outputs conclude as a proper modification to be performed on organic product availability, price and reliability on certification can increase organic product purchase and make it an economic resource.

**Keywords:** Organic product, buying reasons, deterrents, economic resource.

**JEL Codes:** M30, M38, Q10

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The remarkable interest in consuming organic products which is increasing since mid 80's, attracted the attention of many scientists with regard to consumer behaviors, marketing, management and economy. However organic product production still takes a small percentage of the agriculture and remains as a weak source of economy. This research aimed to determine the perception of Turkish consumers on organic products, the demand for organic products in Turkey, the reasons for buying and the deterrents for not buying organic products and finally, after having determined and analyzed all these factors, to find out if positive modifications brought onto the sector can make small scaled local organic product producers a resource for the economy and a value added. To help the research, a questionnaire composed of 41 questions is prepared and stayed online between the dates of November 23, 2018 and December 18, 2018. A total of 556 respondents declared why they purchase and consume organic products and the deterrents preventing them from buying and consuming organic products. They have also replied the questions that were designed to see what changes in the deterrents can convince them to start buy for non-buyers and consume organic products more often, for buyers. Taking into consideration the promising effects on the economy, the deterrents of not buying organic products can and must be studied to find out how to increase the demand and consumption of organic products. Increase of demand will also increase the percentage of arable lands to be used for organic farming, and even small towns will maybe start to work on agriculture of organic food, becoming an economic resource for the region. It is obvious that organic agriculture can become a source of benefits on human health and environmental welfare as well as creating economic value added. This research aims to clarify the reasons of buying and not buying organic products with regard to consumers' perception. Then the results will be used for determining how to manage small scaled organic farmers to come together to form a significant economic value.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Organic farming is coined for the first time by Lord Northbourne in 1940, in his book "Look to the Land". The term in itself covers farming process of food (legumes/fruits/animals) where conventional pesticides, artificial fertilizers, antibiotics or growth hormone, ionizing radiation technics or additives are not used and not contains any GMO in any stage of its production process (İçli, Anıl and Kılıç, 2016). Demiryürek, Stopes and Güzel states on their study dated 2008, USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) describes organic agriculture as a system of production that doesn't permit involvement of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, growth hormones and feeding additives for livestock. Organic farming products are certified by competent and accredited organizations and they are strictly controlled. First steps in organic agriculture field in Turkey have been made due to the importing countries demands on the subject in mid 80s. Aegean region was the first region to start organic agriculture following the demands received from European importers especially for dried raisins and figs. As there was no legislation in force in the early years of this process, Turkey was following and respecting the legislations of importing countries based on the Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 of June 24, 1991 on organic production of agricultural products and indications referring thereto on agricultural products and foodstuff. Then Commission Regulation (EEC) No 94/92 of January 14, 1992 laid down detailed rules for implementing the arrangements for imports from third countries. It requested that countries implement their own regulations in force and they apply to EC preparing a file including several technical and administrative matters as well as the regulation in subject. Thus Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, commenced its studies to prepare a national regulation, based on the EEC 2092/91, together with various establishments and institutions. First regulation of our country on organic agriculture came into force following its publication on official Gazette with number 22147 on the date of December 24, 1994. The first regulation titled "Regulation on Ecological Methods for Production of Plant and Animal Products" has been amended by the Regulation published on the Official Gazette with number 22328, dated June 29, 1995. Numerous researches and studies are conducted to perceive consumers' behaviors and attitudes about organic food. Researches have tried to determine the reasons for buying and consuming organic products and deterrents for not buying and consuming organic products. Some researchers are focused on all possible aspects of organic food consuming reasons (Hughner et al. 2007). Meanwhile; Health issues are emphasized by the studies conducted by Tregear et al. (1994) for the UK, Magnusson et al. (2003) for Sweden, Torjusen et al. (2001) for Norway, by Schifferstein and Ophuis (1998) for Netherlands, by Paul J. and Rana J. (2012) for India. Taste and quality issues are pointed out by the studies of Roddy et al. (1996) conducted for Ireland, Hill and Lynchehaun (2002) for the UK, Magnusson et al. (2003) for Sweden. Squires et al.(2001) underlined the issues on environmental concerns by their studies conducted for Denmark and New Zealand, such as Wilkins and Hillers (1994) who studied for Washington, USD and Zanolli and Naspetti (2002) who studied for Italy and by Magnusson et al. (2003) for Sweden. Food safety issues are emphasized by Albersmeier et al. (2009) for Latin America, by Squires et al. (2001) for Denmark and New Zealand, Michaelidou, N. and Hassan L.M. (2007) for the UK, by Canavari, Bazzani and Spadoni (2002) for Italy. Fotopoulos and Krystallis (2002) pointed out the wish of consumer in supporting local economy. Magnusson et al. (2003) for Sweden also stated the concerns on animal welfare. On the other hand, some of the researchers have also worked to find out the deterrents preventing consumers buying organic products. Conducted studies found out five main deterrents being high prices as a result of the studies conducted by Buder et al. (2012) for Germany. Zanolli and Naspetti (2002) conducted the study for Italy and determined that lack of availability of organic products is another deterrent preventing consumers to buy those products. Lack of trust in organic food origin is pointed out by the studies of Canavari et al. (2002) in Italy is another significant deterrent. Studies of Roddy et al. (1996) that are conducted for Ireland, and studies of Chrysochoidis et al. (2012) conducted for Greece cited insufficient marketing as another deterrent. Cosmetic concerns are marked by Thompson and Kidwell (1998) for USA as a deterrent, although not as much effective as the first four ones.

## 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Methodology

To determine Turkish consumers' organic product perception, their buying reasons and deterrents preventing them from buying, whether modifications on the deterrents can transform them into reasons for buying; a questionnaire composed of 41 questions is settled. The questionnaire was designed in three sections. The first section contained demographic questions such as gender, age, education, residential location, etc. The final question of the first section asked if the respondent uses organic products or not. Two different question sets are composed for users and non-users. Therefore, each respondent answered a different question set due to his/her attitude by the end of the first section. A total of 556 respondents from 30 cities of Turkey and from 4 foreign countries declared their point of view about organic product and provided their opinions on how they can be convinced for buying organic products, for non-buyers and to buy more for already buying consumers. While 5-Likert Scale is used to measure the perception of buyers and non-buyers, to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to determine how they do reach organic food, or the frequency of consummation and the kind of products they consume.

### 3.2. Data

After having discarded the respondents who have not replied to all of the questions, our study continued on 543 respondents' feedbacks. As for demographic questions, the replies provided that;

- ✓ 52% were females and 48% were males. When studied with regard to "Non-buyers" and "Buyers" the percentage was same for both as 52% females and 48% males.
- ✓ 61% of "Non-buyers" are married and 39% are single, while 72% of "Buyers" are married and 28% are single.
- ✓ 2% of the respondents are younger than 20 years old. 2% are between 21-30 years old, 15% are between 31-40 years old, 33% are between 41-50 years old, 31% are between 51-60 years old and 17% are older than 60 years old.
- ✓ 1% of the respondents have education below high school level, 7% have high school education, 54% have undergraduate education, 25% have graduate education and 13% have PhD.
- ✓ 38% of Buyers have no children, 28% have one child only while 31% have two children and 3% have 3 three children. On the other hand, 46% of Non-buyers have no children, 26% have one child, 26% have two children, while 1% have 3 children and 1% have four children.
- ✓ 56% of the respondents live in Istanbul, 2% abroad and remaining 42% live in 29 different cities of Turkey.
- ✓ 9% of the respondents declared that they purchase organic food every day. 32% declared that they buy organic food 2-3 times a week. 33% said they buy organic food once a week. 5% stated that they buy organic food once a month while 15% declared buying organic food 2-3 times a month and 6% stated that they buy even less than that.

The replies given to the common questions, asked both to "Buyers" and "Non-buyers" using Likert scale, are analyzed first by weighted analysis and most remarkable results, showing the perception of organic food by respondents are provided in table 1.

**Table 1: Perception towards the Differences between Organic/Inorganic Products (5: Strongly Agree --- 1: Strongly Disagree)**

QUESTIONS	USERS	NON-USERS
Can easily understand the difference between organic and non-organic food.	3,37	3,25
Know the standards / specifications a product needs to have to be organic	3,68	3,47
Food produced in small villages are already organic	2,25	2,12
Had organic food been more available their consumption could be increased.	4,30	3,78
Had the price of organic products not expensive, they could be purchased more often	4,43	4,26
Ensuring a better look for organic agriculture products as good as non-organic ones, can increase their purchase.	3,10	2,98
Organic agricultural products being delivered to our homes with no packaging is a deterrent reason in their purchase.	2,94	2,61
Implementation of a hundred per cent reliable control system for the certification/control of organic products - such as an application for cell-phones enabling instant check- can increase their consumption.	4,35	3,96

Accordingly, it can be seen that consumers, both users and non-users are aware about the differences between organic and non-organic food; declare that they can buy and/or buy more had the price of organic food not higher than conventionally produced products, had they can easily access organic food and had they trust in the origin of the food. Some questions, which are in fact the same, are asked in different ways to both "Buyer" and "Non-buyer" respondents. Accordingly the gap between the weights of the responses shows that both are thinking in the same way. The outputs are summarized in table 2.

**Table 2: Reasons of Buying / Not Buying Organic Food**

QUESTIONS	USERS	NON-USERS
Organic products are the best for my health / for the health of my family ?	4,11	
<b>Organic products are not the best for my health/for the health of my family.</b>		<b>2,53</b>
I prefer organic food because their production doesn't harm the soil, water and air.	3,99	
<b>Organic agriculture doesn't contribute that much in a sustainable environment.</b>		<b>2,50</b>
I prefer organic food due to the recommendations of people I trust.	3,28	
<b>People I trust and/or people in my surrounding do not use organic products either</b>		<b>3,23</b>
Taste/aroma of organic food is better than the ones which are not organic.	4,06	

<b>Taste/aroma of organic products is not better than non-organic ones.</b>	<b>2,78</b>
Organic food provides the taste / aroma of the food of our childhood times.	3,72
<b>Organic products are not providing the taste/aroma of my childhood which I recall and long for.</b>	<b>3,52</b>
Consuming organic food supports small scaled local producers.	3,83
<b>Consuming organic products doesn't support that much small scaled local producers.</b>	<b>3,18</b>
Animals are not harmed while producing organic food.	3,58
<b>It is not that much possible that animals are not harmed during organic food production</b>	<b>2,94</b>
Organic products have better quality.	3,90
<b>Organic products are not of better quality.</b>	<b>2,89</b>
Using organic product affects our life quality in a positive way.	4,13
<b>Using organic products doesn't that much affect our life quality in a positive way.</b>	<b>2,74</b>

As it can be seen, both users and non-users believe that organic food is good for health; that organic food production helps for the sustainability of the environment; their taste and aroma are better than conventional ones; that they have better quality and that use of organic food affects life quality in a positive way.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The literature indicates various factor that pushes consumers for buying or not buying organic food. In this research we highlight if there is a difference in perception among buyers and non-buyers. A questionnaire is implemented and 516 responses are gathered. The study, apart stating the obvious about the reasons of buying and not buying organic products, showed that ; implementation of a hundred percent liable system to check the origin of the food, may increase the sales for already buying consumers and may convince non-buyers to start to buy; if the prices are more affordable and products are easily accessible buyers can buy more and non-buyers can start to buy. Under the light of the above studying on how to decrease the prices, how to make products more available and especially how to ensure the consumers about the organic origin of the products can help the organic agriculture to become a source of benefits on human health and environmental welfare as well as creating economic value added.

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