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Consumers attitudes towards organic and regional foods: a study covering two regions of Germany and France

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Abstract

The study compares the image of organic agriculture in the regions of Languedoc-Roussillon (France) and Bavaria (Germany). Furthermore it deals with the factors of influence on consumer's attitudes and behaviour towards organic food in both regions.

PREFACE

The aim of recent governmental initiatives in France and Germany is to aid the production and distribution of organic farm produce ; simultaneously, at the regional level, local food products are promoted. To what extent do consumer attitudes and behaviours towards these products differ between the two countries ? An informational labelling based on these two cues would it be relevant in both countries ?

Many researches on organic products have tried to describe the reasons for buying organic foods. Environmental concern and health-related reasons have been identified as important buying motivations. But there is evidence that consumers' environmental concern is almost not reflected in their food choice.

In spite of globalisation tendencies, specific regional food consumption patterns are persistent. Yet, recent studies deliver contradictory results on the importance of the geographical origin of food on the consumer's buying decision.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

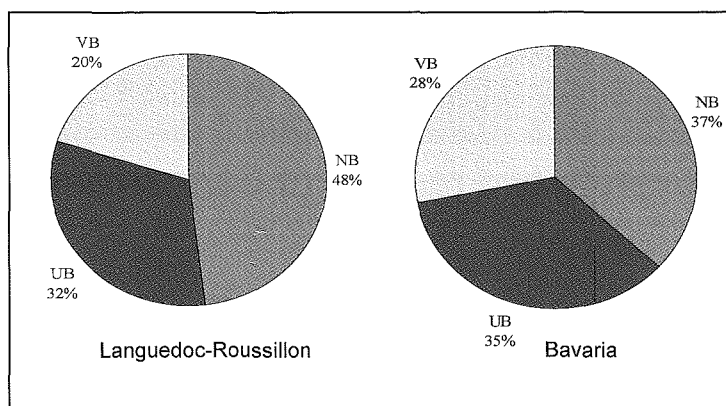
The data were collected by telephonic interviewing in a computer-aided manner (CATI: computer-assisted telephone interviewing) of two random samples in Bavaria (616 persons) and in Languedoc-Roussillon (203 persons).

RESULTS

In both regions some 90% of the interviewees are familiar with the terms "organic food" and "organic agriculture". The percentage of consumers declaring having already bought organic produce is much higher in Bavaria (64%) than in Languedoc-Roussillon (48%).

The "organic food buyers" were asked to specify at least one brand or label of organic produce. According to their answers they were grouped as ("Verified Buyers" (VB) or "Unverified Buyers" (UB). Surprisingly, mistrust in the term "organic" seems to be more widespread in Bavaria.

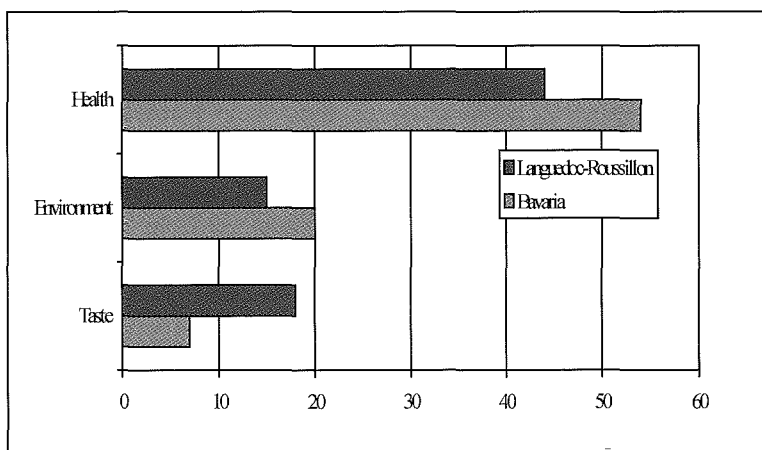
Figure 1 : Consumer groups



When asked about the disadvantages of organic food, consumers in both regions quote the higher prices, the uncertainty whether it's "true" organic or not, and the difficulties of availability.

As for the main advantage of organic food, most consumers in both regions believe it to be health-related reasons.

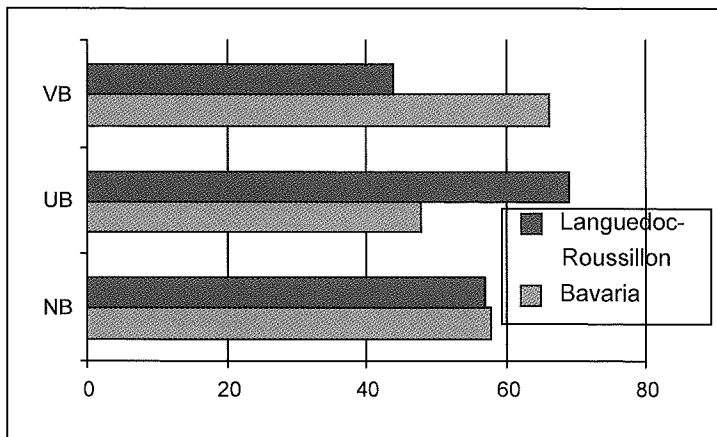
Figure 2 :Advantages of organic food (%)



Apart from that, opinions differ: in Bavaria, environment ranks second, while in Languedoc-Roussillon taste seems to be more important. As well, the importance of the regional origin of food is judged differently by the

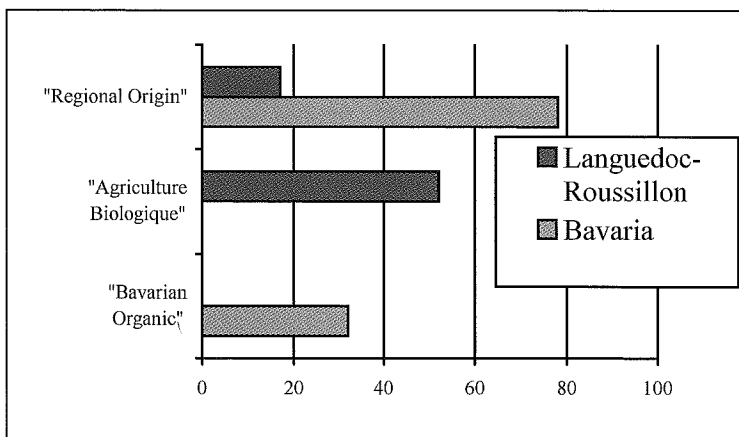
consumer groups in both regions. The following figure shows interviewee's accordance with the statement "If I had the choice, I'd buy only food of my region, even if it was more expensive".

Figure 3 :Importance of regional origin (%)



Finally, respondent's familiarity with a variety of labels stating regional origin and/or organic production was tested.

Figure 4 : Familiarity with labels (%)



Among Bavarian consumers, the label stating regional origin is quite popular, while its homologue in Languedoc-Roussillon is not widely known. As it was revealed in further questions, some 70% of the consumers in both regions put much confidence in these labels.

The results suggest that the marketing for organic food has to differentiate its instruments and foremost communication elements as labels on the regional origin according to the both regions covered.

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