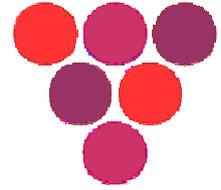




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The determinants factors of consumption of organic olive oil in Catalonia

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The Worldwide area devoted to organic agriculture trebled from 1999 to 2007. This production expansion has been particularly important in the case of Europe where the total million hectares planted in organic agriculture grew from 0.55 to 7.8 (Willes y Yussefi, 2008). The rise in organic production has been accompanied by an increase in organic food demand. However, this demand growth presents cross-country disparity within Europe. In fact, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany and Sweden have an important market devoted to organic food, ranging between 5 and 10% of its food budget, whereas in the case of Spain it represents only 0.7%. Hence, it can be said that for Spain market shares still remains quite small. However, there is a growing interest on both the implications of intensive agricultural production on the environment and the impact of diet on health. Furthermore, there is a great confusion among consumers regarding to the concept of organic agriculture, and its certification guarantees.

Therefore, the main objective of this study consists of a deeper understanding of the determinants that delimitate the Spanish demand for organic food, in general, and olive oil, in particular. We intend to answer some specific question as: the extend to which consumers understand the implications of organic food or organic production in the olive oil case; whether they have a positive or negative perception of organic olive oil; whether they are willing to pay for organic olive oil?; the importance of the way of production, (e.g. organic, conventional, etc) versus origin of the product (eg, locally produced, imported, etc); and finally the extent to which consumers' attributes such as gender, age or income can effect consumers purchase intentions towards organic food. To achieve these objectives, a discrete choice experiment was conducted by means of 400 surveys in the Spanish region of Catalonia. Catalonia has been chosen to implement the current study because of its high organic food industry and particularly because of the scarcity, if not absence of such studies in the region.

The results indicate the following. First, the market of organic olive oil in Catalonia is a relatively small market. Second, little information and hardly any interest in learning about such products exist. Specifically, lack of knowledge by the majority of respondents in relation to the term organic farming and its logo has been noticed. Ultimately, the determinant factor in the purchase of extra virgin olive oil in Catalonia is mainly the origin of olives, particularly appreciation of the Catalan origin and quality. This study argues that though Catalan consumers recognize the benefits associated with organic olive oil, they do not value its quality as they do in the case of olive oils with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO).