Interest of Italian Consumers for a Sustainable Wine
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Abstract

In recent years farmers and producers seem interested and involved in changing wine production towards a more sustainable way. Although not considered as dirty as other sectors, the wine business has been increasingly driven by several factors to assess and reduce the impacts of their products on the environment. This interest for sustainability has arisen particularly in Countries belonging to the New Wine World - Australia, New Zealand and California, but Italy has now also stepped up to the challenge: the most consistent sign of interest for sustainability in the wine sector in Italy can be considered the wide range of sustainability programs launched in recent years by private producers and consortiums. Although the big interest shown by the Italian wine sector towards sustainability, few studies have been conducted about consumer perception and the possible market for sustainable wine.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first of all, to understand consumers' interest for sustainable wine; secondly, to explore their perception about a sustainability label and/or certification. The impact of communicating sustainability, indeed, is still not really clear, particularly for what concern the wine sector. Episodes of wineries committed in sustainability but refusing to put the certification seal on their bottles have been noticed, due to their fear of consumers’ negative perception of sustainability as negative impacting on the quality and/or safety of the products. Hence, in this study, consumers' interest for a label and its effects on the product's quality and safety have been also explored.

Methodology: A web-based survey was used in order to collect answers and to ensure a good spread of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed by 18 questions, divided in three sections: a first one aimed to define the profile of our respondents according to their beliefs on topics as environment protection, life style etc. The second one was dedicated to the sustainability label (perception and interest in), and the final part to the socio-demographic aspects. A short introduction, at the beginning of the survey, explained very briefly the object of the questionnaire and the definition of "Sustainable Development" (definition provided by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987). A qualifying question was used to ensure that all the respondents use to drink wine: people answering they never consume wine were redirected to the end of questionnaire. Data were collected from more than 500 wine drinkers in Italy, from different areas and background (age, education, sex, etc.). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each of the statement presented in the questionnaire.

Results: the frequency analysis has revealed first of all that consumers believe that nowadays information about the sustainability and the impact of the food they purchase are still not available. Focusing on wine, they have a good perception of environmental labels and they would like to see a sustainability label on a bottle of wine. According to the results, this label could be useful to enhance their awareness about the topic of sustainable development in the wine sector and it could be also useful to make sustainability become a more influencing parameter on the choice of a wine. Consumers also feel confident about their understanding and comprehension about the label, and finally they would be available to pay a higher price for a label with a sustainability certification provided by the third party in which they trust more (Research Center, University, Trade Association, Public Institution, etc.). Finally, with
the use of a logit regression model, it has been seen that being female and with a high education background increase the probability of buying a sustainable labelled wine. However, it is necessary to consider that a sustainability label is not perceived as a warranty for food safety and quality. This is coherent with a part of the literature, and suggest us that communication strategies of sustainability should be properly studied in order to convey the correct messages to the final consumers.

Conclusions: the presence of sustainability labels on food, particularly on wine, is still quite unclear. This study would like to offer a contribute to better understand the perception of sustainability label applied on wine from Italian consumers and the results could be useful to wineries and farmers committed in sustainability programs, suggesting them possible communication strategies, particularly through the adoption of sustainability labels and certifications.

Keywords: Sustainability; Wine; Consumers’ attitude; Logit model