

Consumer Sensory Expectations of Swiss Organic Yoghurt

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Background

Sensory characteristics play a key role in the decision to repurchase all food products, including organic. Thus, it is important to know more about consumers' sensory experiences and their expectations of organic foods. One objective of the European Commission funded project ECROPOLIS was to determine these sensory consumer experiences and expectations.

Methods

Within the project different food products, including yoghurt, were evaluated. A qualitative consumer survey (with focus groups) on organic consumers' sensory experiences, expectations and preferences with respect to organic food, and a quantitative consumer survey (n=296) was accomplished. Furthermore, to gain insights into the current situation for yoghurt on the Swiss market, a quantitative sensory consumer test (n=60) with natural and strawberry yoghurts was carried out.

Results

The results of the focus group discussions show that consumers in Switzerland have a positive sensory perception of organic food. Particularly fresh organic products, including organic dairy products and other "healthy" and low processed product categories are linked with a positive sensory image. Organic production is associated by Swiss consumers with traditional rural agricultural and natural food production: self-made, authentic and regionally produced (see Figure 1). Consumers expect organic yoghurts to contain less sugar than conventional ones. They also expect the inclusion of natural and authentic sensory ingredients.

Results (continued)

Although certain products are preferred in conventional, non-organic quality (e.g. sweets, convenience food), consumers are of the opinion that the laws governing organic regulation should not be relaxed in order to adapt organic products to conventional sensory properties.

In the quantitative sensory consumer test, natural yoghurts with a middle intensity of sourness in taste and a creamy texture and a dense mouthfeel were preferred. Regarding strawberry yoghurt, consumers seem to prefer strawberry yoghurts that have an intense strawberry-like odour and taste, are middle intense regarding sourness in taste, are not too pale in colour and that have a creamy texture as well as a sticky mouthfeel (see Figure 2).

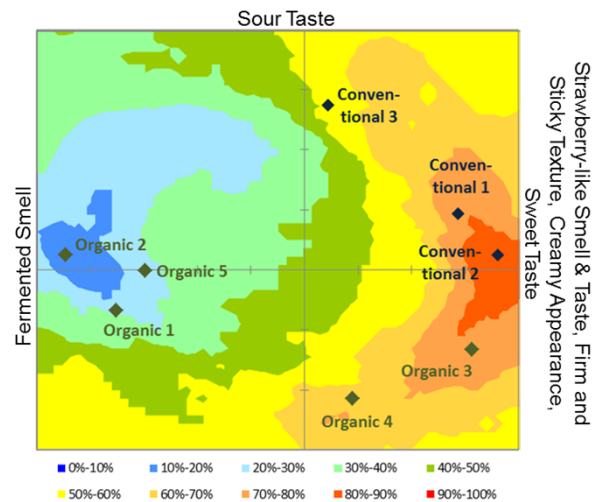


Figure 2: Preference Map for Strawberry Yoghurt with correlated sensory attributes

There are organic natural and organic strawberry yoghurts on the Swiss market which fulfill the consumers' sensory expectations and are very well liked. But there are also natural and strawberry yoghurts which do not meet these expectations. However, these products are mostly produced by smaller regional enterprises and are often purchased for reasons other than sensory.

Conclusions

The sensory image of organic products in Switzerland is good but sensory deficits are an important barrier to organic consumption. Fresh produce, dairy products and other "healthy" and low processed categories are linked with a good sensory image. In Switzerland, most consumers perceive organic food as full of taste and prefer the organic alternative when the organic label is presented. For organic yoghurt the consumers expect natural and authentic sensory ingredients.



Figure 1: Overview of symbolic meanings and images related to organic food