



Abstract

Perception and Consumption of Organic Food in a Group of Organic and Conventional Fruit Growers—A Pilot Study (CO-FRESH Project) [†]

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Abstract: Background and Objectives: The organic farming system takes a restrictive approach to cultivation, production and food processing techniques, resulting in a product that is richer in selected nutrients with less contamination. The aim of our study was to assess the consumption and perception of organic food by orchardists in organic and conventional production. Methods: A total of 58 orchardists took part in the study of which 31 were from an organic farm and 27 were from a conventional farm. Respondents had their height and weight measured. The study used a self-administered questionnaire in which the respondents stated the percentage of their food that came from organic farming as well as which food groups they consumed in the organic version. Respondents compared organic and conventional products in terms of taste, smell, appearance, texture, composition, shelf life and overall quality. Results: The median age of the study group was 44 years and the mean BMI was 28.22 ± 4.3 kg/m². No differences were observed between organic and conventional orchardists ($p > 0.05$). Forty-three participants in the study consumed organic food, most for more than 3 years ($n = 31$). The proportion of organic products in the diet of organic orchardists was mostly 20–40%, and in that of conventional orchardists the proportion was <20%. Organic fruit growers consumed organic food more often and in higher amounts ($p < 0.001$). Eggs as well as fruit and vegetables were the most commonly consumed in the organic version. Both organic and conventional growers rated organic food as having better taste, smell, texture, composition and overall quality but poorer appearance and shelf life compared with conventional food. Organic farmers rated the taste and smell ($p < 0.001$), texture ($p = 0.02$) and composition ($p = 0.002$) to be significantly better. No differences were observed between the groups in the evaluation of appearance, shelf life and overall quality ($p > 0.05$). In both subgroups, organic food was collectively rated as better than conventional food. However, organic fruit growers rated it to be better than the conventional ones ($p < 0.001$). Participants eating more organic food rated it to be significantly better ($p < 0.001$). Discussion/Conclusions: Organic food was rated to be better compared with conventional food. Organic orchardists rated organic food to be better and consumed it more compared with conventional orchardists. Better organic food ratings resulted in more frequent consumption across a greater variety of products.

Keywords: orchardists; organic food; consumption; organic food perception; Poland



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