Journal of Agricultural Science and Technology B 3 (2013) 272-283
Earlier title: Journal of Agricultural Science and Technology, ISSN 1939-1250

Direct Marketing and Consumer Trust in Organic Food Products: Vilnius (Lithuania) Case

Virgilijus Skulskis and Vilija Girgždienė
Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics, V. Kudirkos str. 18-2, Vilnius LT-03105, Lithuania

Received: December 28, 2012 / Published: April 20, 2013.

Abstract: The market of organic food products has a continuous upward trend though the growth rate and sale channels in individual countries are rather different. This research aims to identify the key factors that influence consumers' choice to buy organic food products in Lithuania focusing on the consumer trust in the quality and the most acceptable marketing channels. In order to get the necessary information, the residents of Vilnius (the capital of Lithuania), as having the greatest potential for the organic food market in the country, were interviewed. The analysis of collected data was done using the methods of mathematical statistics and comparison of relative frequencies. The results of this research prove the increasing consumers' interest in organic food products. The majority of consumers consider these products to be healthier, better-tasting and fresher. Only about a third of the purchasers (usually buying frequently) can see differences between organic and non-organic products, therefore, there is a problem to distinguish organic food from conventional products and, consequently, remains a possibility to cheat the consumer. An additional quality control and direct sales from known and familiar farmers might increase trust in the quality of organic food products. So far, supermarkets are the most important place to buy organic foods, however, the greater consumer confidence in the quality of organic products bought at farmers' markets and the acceptance of the majority of purchasers to buy organic food products directly from the farmers suppose the need to develop a direct marketing system.

Key words: Organic food products, consumers, consumer trust, direct marketing, specialized farmers' markets.

1. Introduction

Organic food products are becoming increasingly popular, their production and consumption keeps a continuous upward trend that has a positive impact on the development of sustainable agriculture. The attitudes of organic consumers have a dual nature that basically determine their behaviour when buying these products, but a confidence in organic farming and benefits of organic products is a basis for the formation of habits of such consumption. The consumer trust in these products has a double meaning: the trust in the system of organic production (institutional trust) and the trust in the leaders and participants of the organic movement (personal trust) [1, 2]. In a free market-system, the results of organic producers are mainly determined by the final act—the sales of the products. Inevitably, the functions of agricultural producers, including the marketing of the products, have partly changed. The marketing of organic products is one of the important elements of the rural development that complement on-farm employment and improve relations with the local consumers of such products [3]. These changes are mainly caused by the results of the initiative of a particular producer, based on production specialization and the produced amounts, ways and channels of marketing, chosen development strategy. Few studies have been done on organic producers' motivation for choosing marketing strategies, but, from the consumer side, effective studies on direct sales in Lithuania are rather rare. The problem of the research is what is the consumers' response to more active direct sales of organic food products?

Corresponding author: Virgilijus Skulskis, Ph.D., research fields: agricultural economics and management, organic agriculture, organic food products. E-mail: virgis@laei.lt.

The aim of the research is to identify the key factors of direct marketing that influence consumers' choice to buy organic food products in Lithuania focusing on the consumer trust in the quality of organic food and the most acceptable marketing channels. The object of the research is focused on the factors encouraging direct sales of organic products. The study was conducted interviewing respondents in Vilnius, and the data treated using the methods of mathematical statistics, comparison of relative frequencies.

2. Materials and Methods

The survey-based research was focused on the population of Vilnius, the capital city, having the largest share of potential organic food market in Lithuania. Telephone interviews using a questionnaire prepared in advance have been selected to receive the required data. This method allowed to collect information rapidly and to get quite accurate data about the object of the research and certain attitudes of organic consumers.

Stratified random sampling was applied for the selection of respondents. In total 502 residents of Vilnius over 18 years old answered presented questions. In order to analyze more exactly the habits of organic consumers, an additional criterion for the number of respondents was included: not less than 250 respondents consuming organic food at least once a month had to be interviewed. The results of such size sample have an error of no more than plus/minus 4%. The survey was carried out in November 2010 by Lithuanian-British market research and public opinion company Baltic Surveys Ltd.. The results reflect the views of Vilnius residents regarding gender, age, family income, frequency of the purchase of organic products.

The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, of which five closed format questions that included multiple choice or scaled answers and nine open format questions that gave the respondents an opportunity to express their opinions. In five questions, respondents had a possibility to choose a few answers. Nine additional questions were designed to determine demographic characteristics of the respondents and to identify the main person who buys in a family.

The survey involved 49% of men and 51% of women. A percentage distribution of the respondents in age groups was rather equal: the groups of 18-29, 30-39 and 40-49 years old made up 21% each, the group of 50-59 years old accounted for 17% and the group of 60 years old and over comprised 20% of the respondents.

As concerns education, 30% of the respondents had secondary or incomplete secondary education, 39%—special secondary or non-university bachelor's degree and 31%—university education.

Depending on the family's monthly income, the respondents were grouped into three groups: the group of less than LTL[1] 1,600 accounted for 36%, that of LTL 1,601-3,000-33%, and that of over LTL 3,000—16%. The other interviewees (15%) refused to reveal their income.

According to the purchase frequency, a number of occasions during a period of time that a consumer purchases organic products, the respondents were grouped as follows: buying two or more times a week (8%), once a week (17%), 2-3 times a month (11%), at least once a month (18%), less than once a month (17%), not buying at all (24%); 5% of the respondents did not named the purchase frequency.

A study of the academic literature, research results and scientific papers was used to prepare a questionnaire, and the results of the survey were analyzed using mathematical statistical methods. In order to determine statistically significant groups of the respondents, a comparison of percentage frequencies was applied [4]. On purpose to compare two factors (p_i and p_j) of the analyzed groups, a level of significance was calculated according to the following formula:

$$Z_{ij} = \frac{|p_i - p_j|}{\sqrt{p_{ij}(100 - p_{ij})\frac{n_i + n_j}{n_i n_j}}}$$

1 EUR = 3.4528 LTL; 1 USD = 2.6067 LTL (2010).

where, $p_{ij} = 100\dfrac{x_i + x_j}{n_i + n_j}$; n_i, n_j—number of respondents in groups i and j; x_i, x_j—number of positive answers in groups i and j.

Since the number of the respondents in groups according to the purchase frequency was insufficient (the methodology requires that $n > 50$), in order to calculate the statistical significance, the groups of the respondents "buying two or more times a week" and "buying once a week" were combined into a group "buying weekly" as well as the groups of the respondents "buying 2-3 times a month" and "buying once a month" were combined into a group "buying monthly". The calculated value Z_{ij} is compared with the value of $Z_{0.95}$ ($Z_{0.95}$ = 1.96), i.e., this value is based on the fact that 95% of the area of a normal distribution is within 1.96 standard deviations of the mean confidence level. If $Z_{ij} \geq Z_{0.95}$, a significant difference between the percentage frequencies p_i and p_j exists, and if it is less ($Z_{ij} < Z_{0.95}$), there is no significant difference.

3. Results and Discussion

The direct marketing of agricultural products is a quite distinctive area of sales, the volumes and benefits of which are understood quite differently. The group of Irish researchers emphasized the multiple benefits of direct sales, such as a positive effect on the environment and a direct communication with consumers [5]. There are many different forms of such marketing: trade in kiosks, in boxes, local markets, direct sales in farms, sales to catering (hotels, restaurants), electronic commerce. Different marketing channels suppose appropriate actions and at once challenge the needs for new marketing knowledge. The Lithuanian researchers analyzed the direct sales of agricultural and food products and concluded that this form of marketing is becoming more niche, therefore, sellers should organize it taking into consideration the specifics of this type of trade [6].

The survey on organic and non-organic farmers (more than 300 respondents in each group) conducted in the United Kingdom with a particular focus on England showed that the people who operate organic farms are typically younger and more highly educated than their non-organic counterparts, significantly more new working places have been created in organic farms, organic farmers are more active and more open to business innovations [7]. The results of such farms performance in England are also better: organic farm businesses, as compared to non-organic farms, generate sales of greater value per hectare by 45% and the income from direct sales is higher even by 53%. 38.6% of organic farms and only 13.1% of non-organic farms are involved in direct marketing forms such as farm shops, box scheme, farmers' markets, etc. [7]. The farmer, with the intention of competing successfully in the market, must acquire knowledge of direct marketing, but the Finnish survey on entrepreneurial skills of farmers, independent of the production method, showed that the farmers lack such knowledge [8].

The researchers from Austria chose a group interview method and concentrated on scientists engaged in organic research and their personal impressions and observations on the development of organic farming as a phenomenon. The main finding of the discussion with the scientists of predominantly German speaking countries at the 8th Scientific Conference on Organic Agriculture (in Kassel, Germany) is that the direct marketing of organic products has far more potential to the development of locally oriented organic product chains. Such chains would help to establish the mutual trust between producers and consumers, to understand each other better, to start mutual communication that would help faster to embed an organic philosophy and such farming systems [9].

The consumers of organic products prefer to buy directly from the farmers because then they are sure that it is an organic food [10]. Also consumers have more confidence in organic foods, which they acquire in small health food stores where a direct relationship between a consumer and a seller or producer/farmer exists [1]. A group of scientists, aiming to analyse consumers' attitudes towards the purchase place of organic products, surveyed more than 800 organic consumers in five major cities in Turkey and found out that the consumers prefer to purchase these products at the local markets, only then in supermarkets [11].

The research on local organic food interviewing both producers (33) and consumers (181) purchasing organic products in the United Kingdom showed that both groups of the respondents closely related organic products to the local organic market and an extra value-added. "Organic food", in the opinion of the consumers, has a strong association with vegetables/fruit, "locally grown", health, freshness, taste and seasonality, organic farming requires more obligations and responsibilities such as conservation, sustainability, additional labour resources, a wide range of products, quality, etc.. Both the consumers and the farmers are critical speaking about retailers and their long food supply chain, therefore, it is necessary to look for alternative supply channels [12].

Despite the direct marketing of organic products is widespread in Lithuania, 67% of the consumers prefer to buy these products in supermarkets due to a wider assortment and better geographical location. This conclusion followed the study on the opinion of more than 800 respondents in Lithuania [13]. The research on the consumption of organic food products and information sources promoting it highlighted that every third consumer would buy more of these products if there were more special trade places [14].

In Germany, the survey-based research conducted in 30 organic and conventional on-farm stores (more than 1,300 respondents-food purchasers) revealed that these buyers are a group of customers with a focus on a higher quality food. The farmers characterize them as the consumers of a higher income and better education, who agree to pay more for the quality of products. The results emphasize the role of the store atmosphere and customer service as the main factors influencing customer satisfaction: the sale process must be an event for the buyers, and the sellers must know the main service rules to be friendly with and attentive to the buyers [15].

The researchers from Australia surveyed the global organic industry and stressed that the most important attributes of organic products is health, quality and environment. Conducting this research they explored a wide range of retail outlets for organic products. Retailers specialize in health food stores or organic food co-operatives, but home delivery service is a unique retail solution. Such organization of marketing has no retail outlet and a deal between producers and consumers is direct [16].

The research on the organizational forms of sales in the countries of the European Union revealed that organic products are mainly sold in two ways: through direct marketing tools (dominating in Belgium, Germany, Greece, France, Luxembourg, Italy, Netherlands and Spain) and through large-scale sale organizations (in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom, Hungary and Czech Republic) [17].

The analysis of the reports of the United States Department of Agriculture about the sales of organic products showed that in 2008 different sized farms sold only 7% of organic products directly to consumers [18]. But with reference to the materials of the Congressional Research Service, it is stated that in the United States as much as 16% of organic products are sold through direct marketing channels [19].

The survey of 817 organic farmers in the United States revealed that they are rather flexible in their marketing models and can develop skills competence and technical knowledge selling products in local outlets (within 100 miles of the primary farm). 39% of the farmers sell up to one quarter of their output locally, only 8% of the farmers sell from one to three quarters of their products through local outlets and over half (53%) of the farmers sell the majority of their products to local buyers [20].

The analysis of the downward changes in the organic practice in Norway showed that the share of direct sales of 220 respondent organic farmers accounted for 13.9% of their output, while this share was even larger in the group of farmers who ceased certified organic farming and returned to conventional practices [21].

In Poland, aiming to identify relations between organic farms and distribution channels, a survey interviewing 188 fully converted organic farmers was conducted. The investigated farms represented the farm size groups of the general population of organic holdings in the country and a wide range of organic production. The results showed that even 93% of poultry, 85% of eggs, 78% of vegetables and 61% of fruit the farmers sell directly to the consumers. The higher prices, lower transportation costs, knowing what the consumers need and what they expect are the advantages of the direct sales. The direct sales of organic products is the main form of the organic marketing in Poland, and only the farmers developing such production practice for a long time are able to develop good relations with distributors and the proper co-operation in the whole supply chain [22].

In Lithuania, as in Poland, the situation in the market of organic products is similar. The direct sales dominate accounting for 75% of eggs, 73% of vegetables, 63% of poultry, 59% of fruit. The establishment of specialized cooperatives could facilitate the development of marketing of organic food products [23]. Aiming to examine the factors that promote organic farming in Lithuania were interviewed 459 farmers, nearly 43% of which thought that the local markets is the best opportunity to sell organic products; usually the farmers of 10-40 ha made use of this opportunity [24].

The study on the extent of consumption and assessment of organic food of the adult residents of Vilnius (Lithuania) identified that the key reasons why people consume organic food products are healthiness (90%), good taste (38.9%) and safety (27.3%), while high prices (53.3%), the inability to distinguish organic products (28.3%) and the shorter expiry period (21.7%) are the key factors that lessen the consumption. Organic food is consumed by a significantly greater number of young people who generally buy it in supermarkets and know how to distinguish organic products from conventional ones, however, the majority of the population still lacks information on how to identify organic products [25].

Most consumers have little contact with the organic farmers, so they do not see how products are produced organically. As a result, there are doubts if the production of organic products is fully in compliance with the underlying principles of the organic movement [26]. With reference to the results of the survey about the meeting of the abovementioned principles in five European countries (in Austria, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom and Switzerland) [27], seven ethical attributes that are relevant to the consumer decision to buy organic food products were researched [28]. The results indicate that animal welfare (feed, housing conditions and health care), production (local/regional) and fair prices for farmers are the most relevant additional ethical attributes influencing the purchase decision. The argument from the own region is the most important in many researched countries [28]. The consumers are more willing to buy organic food produced not only in accordance with the EU regulation, but also reflecting a number of key areas which are of concern to both consumers and producers, such as fairness [26].

For many regular consumers, the origin of organic products is very important. Besides, they recognise the need for some external verification that seems to be related to mistrust of organic standards. The producers aiming to answer consumers' expectations hope to build trust through direct interactions and communication [12].

Organic food products in Lithuania are available in supermarkets, specialised shops, local markets, specialized organic farmers' markets, organic food fairs. The results of the consumer survey revealed that at least once a week organic food buy 25% of the interviewed residents of Vilnius. This group mainly consists of the respondents with the largest (over LTL 3,000) monthly family income and under the age of 50 years. 11% of the respondents purchase organic food 2-3 times a month, usually this do young people under the age of 30 years and the persons with a monthly family income of LTL 1,601-3,000. 18% of the respondents buy organic food at least once a month, usually this do the people of 40-49 years old. 17% of the respondents buy organic food rarer than once a month, more often, the people of 50-59 years old and with a monthly family income less than LTL 1,600. Nearly a quarter (24%) of Vilnius residents does not buy organic food products at all. In most cases, this group belong to the people of 60 years old and the persons with a monthly family income less than LTL 1,600 (Fig. 1).

The analysis of the purchase frequency of the respondents by age showed that the persons of 18-29 and of 40-49 years old most often tend to buy weekly and monthly, and there is no statistically significant difference among these groups (Z_{ij} < 1.96); only the group of consumers buying rarer than once a month distinguish (Z_{ij} ranging from 2.536 to 3.589). The buyers of the groups aged 30-39, 50-59 years and 60 years and over purchase alike, there is no statistically significant difference between these groups (Z_{ij} < 1.96).

With respect to the purchase frequency in the groups of different age, it is seen that there is no significant difference between the age groups of the respondents "buying weekly" (Z_{ij} < 1.96). In most age groups of the respondents buying monthly (buying weekly excluded), there is no significant difference (Z_{ij} < 1.96) also except the group of consumers of 50-59 years old (Z_{ij} = 2.148). When purchasing at least once a month (buying weekly included), significantly differ the age groups of 50-59 years old and of 60 years old and over (Z_{ij} ranging from 2.165 to 2.484). Between all age groups of the respondents buying less than once a month, there is no statistically significant difference (Z_{ij} < 1.96).

The analysis of the purchase frequency of the respondents by income groups revealed that usually the group of buying weekly consists of the consumers with

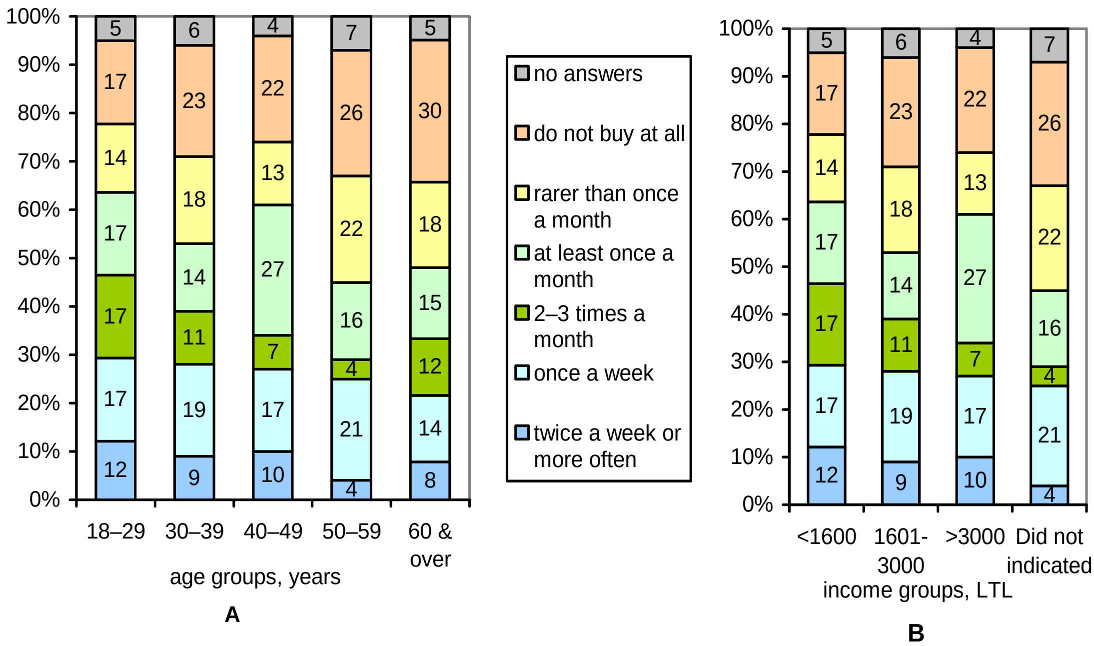

Fig. 1 Frequency of purchase of organic products by: A-age of the respondents; B-monthly family income (all respondents).

a monthly family income greater than LTL 3000 (Z_{ij} ranging from 2.040 to 2.606). Among the groups of the respondents buying monthly (buying weekly excluded) and buying less than once a month the significant difference was not observed (Z_{ij} < 1.96).

The interviewed purchasers with the family income less than LTL 1,600 have a similar practice of the purchase: there is no significant difference among the groups of buying weekly, buying monthly and buying less than once a month (Z_{ij} < 1.96). The respondents with a monthly family income of LTL 1,601-3,000 more frequent buy once a month and less than once a month (Z_{ij} ranging from 2.242 to 3.836). In the group of interviewees with a monthly family income over LTL 3,000 the consumers buying weekly purchase more frequent (Z_{ij} ranging from 2.854 to 3.476).

The most important reason why 77% of the respondents buy organic food products is that, in their opinion, these products are healthier than conventional food. More than a third of the organic food consumers consider these products to be better-tasting and fresher, or support organic farmers buying their products (35%, 33% and 31%, respectively). Unfortunately, only 19% of the respondents take care about the environment and, consequently, buy these products. Women and the people with a monthly family income of LTL 1,601-3,000 concern more about the environmental problems.

60% of the respondents think that the main reason that lowers the popularity of organic food is too high prices in comparison with the prices of adequate conventional products. Generally such an opinion expressed women, the people younger than 40 years old and the respondents with the lowest family income (less than LTL 1,600). In the opinion of 15% of the respondents, there is a problem to distinguish organic food products from conventional products (remains a possibility to cheat the buyer) that reduces the popularity of these products. Such an opinion most often declared men, the persons of over 40 years old, the respondents with a monthly family income of LTL 1,601-3,000, and the consumers buying organic food occasionally (rarer than once a month). 10% of the respondents indicated a lack of information about organic products; usually more information need men and the consumers of 60 years old and over. A small percentage (only 5%) of the respondents demanded for a wider product range offering; usually the persons of 50-59 years old, the consumers buying organic food once a week or more often.

The analysis of the survey responses about high prices of organic products and difficulties to distinguish them from conventional food by age of the respondents and monthly family income showed no statistically important differences (Z_{ij} < 1.96).

34% of the organic food buyers believe that there is a difference between organic and non-organic food, but consumers should be careful when choosing products. Such an opinion generally expressed women and the respondents of the youngest group (18-29 years old) who buy organic food once a week or more often (buying weekly). Another one-third of the respondents believe that the differences between organic and non-organic foods are minimal, and only the experienced buyer can noticed them. This opinion more often expressed the respondents of 30-39 years old purchasing organic products a few times a month or less. More than 22% of the consumers think that the differences between organic and non-organic products are invisible; such opinion usually expressed the purchasers over the age of 50 years and the persons buying organic food less than once a month. It is natural that the more often consumers buy organic products, the easier they distinguish them from the conventional food: significant differences notice 9% of the purchasers buying once a week and more often (buying weekly), 3% of the consumers buying once a month (buying monthly), and the respondents buying organic products occasionally generally do not notice any significant differences.

When analysing by age groups, most often differences between organic and non-organic food observe the respondents of 30-39 years old (Z_{ij} =

2.099); the purchasers of other age groups notice no significant difference (Z_{ij} < 1.96). The analysis of groups by the purchase frequency shows that usually the respondents buying weekly can find differences between organic and conventional products (Z_{ij} ranging from 2.099 to 3.350).

The consumers over 50 years old (groups of 50-59 years and 60 years and over) and the persons who buy organic food less than once a month stated that there is no differences between organic and non-organic products.

Regardless of family income level and age of the respondents, the interviewed buyers think that the differences between organic from non-organic products exist (Z_{ij} ranging from 3.291 to 4.933).

Some cases of organic and conventional products confusion and nitrate residues in organic products have raised consumers' doubts about the quality of organic food products. In the quality of these products more often trust the purchasers with the largest monthly family income (over LTL 3,000), however, even 66% of the respondents express their confidence in the quality of organic products bought in farmers' markets and only 51% trust in supermarkets (Fig. 2).

The trust in the quality of organic food products is greater in the groups of younger respondents (18-29 and 30-39 years old), with the largest monthly family income (over LTL 3,000), and buying products frequently (once a week or more often). The trust of older consumers, purchasers with a lower monthly family income and occasional buyers gradually goes down. Nearly 30% of the purchasers distrust (4% absolutely distrust and 26% more distrust than trust) in the quality of organic foods sold at farmers' market and even 47% (9% absolutely distrust and 38% more distrust than trust) do not rely on the quality of these products sold in supermarkets; such opinion usually have older purchasers (groups of 40-49, 50-59 years old and 60 years old and over), with a monthly family income less than LTL 3000 and the persons buying organic foods rarely (less than once a month).

When comparing the consumer confidence in farmers' markets and supermarkets, it can be stated that the purchasers with a lower monthly family income (groups of less than LTL 1,600 and LTL 1,601-3,000) have more confidence in farmers' markets (Z_{ij} = 2.097 and Z_{ij} = 2.497). While the respondents with a higher monthly family income (over LTL 3,000) trust in both farmers' markets and supermarkets alike, i.e., there is no statistically significant difference (Z_{ij} < 1.96). Regardless of family income level, the attitudes of the majority of the respondents towards farmers' markets are advantageous (Z_{ij} = 3.538).

As concerns the comparison of the interviewees by age groups, the consumers of 18-29 and 30-39 years old trust the most in farmers' markets (Z_{ij} = 3.013 and Z_{ij} = 2.511). The confidence of the older respondents (40-49, 50-59 and 60 years old and over) in farmers' markets and supermarkets is alike (Z_{ij} < 1.96).

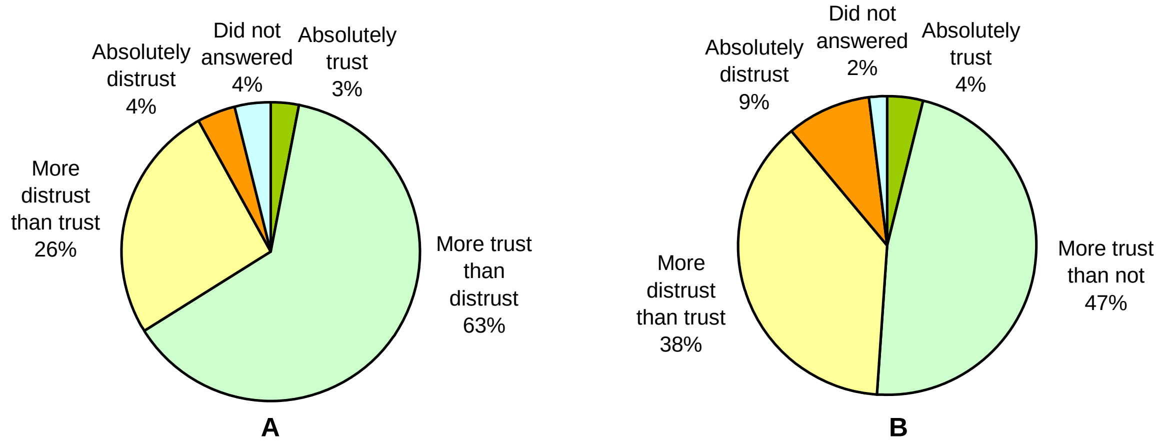

Fig. 2 Consumer trust in the quality of organic food products in: A-farmers' markets; B-supermarkets (only purchasers).

Since the consumer confidence in farmers' markets is high, even 82% of the respondents accept (40% absolutely accept and 42% more accept than not) the idea to sell organic products in special markets. Women, young persons (18-29 years old), the purchasers with a high family income (over LTL 3,000) and the consumers buying organic foods weekly generally support the idea of specialized farmers' markets.

The analysis of consumer groups by income level revealed that the idea to sell organic products in farmers' markets is mainly supported by the respondents with a medium (LTL 1,600-3,000) and high (over LTL 3,000) monthly family income (Z_{ij} = 2.252 and Z_{ij} = 2.200). When compared the respondents by age groups, there is no statistically significant differences in any group ($Z_{ij} < 1.96$).

The most often named factor that might increase the consumer trust in organic food products is an additional quality control of these products (in total 63% of the respondents named it and 31% indicated it as the most important). According to the named frequency (56%), the purchase from the known or familiar organic farmers ranks second; 29% of interviewees identified it as the most important. Thus, this factor implies to analyse trends of organic sales and to initiate particular measures. 40% of the respondents mentioned a clear labelling of organic products as the factor increasing the consumers' confidence (Fig. 3).

More and more food products are sold in specialized farmers' markets and fairs: according to the acceptance, this channel of sales ranks second among the most popular trade places of organic food products (54% of the respondents named it). But for the meantime supermarkets still rank first as the main place of organic food purchase; it was named by 62% of the respondents, mostly young consumers (group of 18-29 years old, the persons buying once a week or more often). Specialized farmers' markets and organic food fairs are the most preferred places to purchase organic food products even for a quarter of the consumers of age groups of 40-49 years old and of 60 years old and over, buying 1-3 times a month (buying monthly).

The opportunity to buy organic food products in specialized shops highlighted 36% of the respondents. The same percentage of the respondents prefers to buy

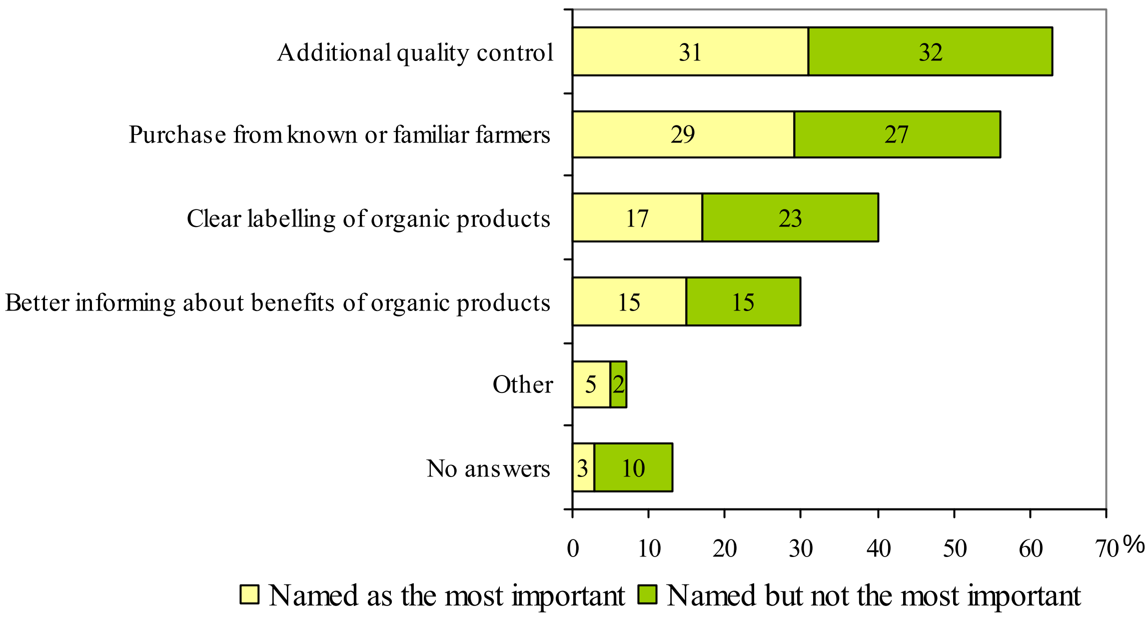

Fig. 3 The factors increasing the consumer trust in organic products (all respondents).

directly from the organic farmers. However, specialized organic shops as a desirable place to buy more often named the young people (groups of 18-29 and 30-39 years old) and the persons with a monthly family income less than LTL 1,600, while to buy products directly in organic farms would like the respondents of 40-59 years old, who buy organic food 1-3 times a month. More than a third of consumers would go directly to farms, if they were closer than 30 km from their living place. As concerns the income groups, the people with a monthly family income of LTL 1,601-3,000 and of over LTL 3,000 (17% and 12%, respectively) would be happy to buy products directly on organic farms. However, as much as 41% of the respondents would not go directly to farms for organic products. Generally there are men, the older people (60 years old and over), with a monthly family income less than LTL 1,600, the persons buying organic products occasionally (less than once a month). This trade channel increases the consumer trust in the quality of organic food products but is related to higher expenses.

Every second organic food buyer (53%) is interested in products' origin, i.e., in the country of production and in a particular producer. The origin of organic products is more important for women, for the respondents of 30-39 years old, with an average monthly family income (LTL 1,601-3,000) and for the people who buy these products at least once a month and more often (buying monthly). Generally, the country of production and a particular producer is an object of interest of the purchasers with a university education, managers, professionals and housewives. Slightly more than 21% of purchasers is interested only in the country of production, while a particular producer is important only for 10% of organic products consumers. Usually only the older consumers (groups of 50-59 years old and of 60 years old and over) are interested in the country of production or in a particular producer. Unfortunately, 15% of organic food buyers are not interested neither in the country of production, nor in a particular producer. To such category of consumers belong the young people of 18-29 years old and the occasional organic food buyers (buying less than once a month).

The analysis of respondents' interest in the country and particular producer within the income and age groups revealed that there are no statistically significant differences ($Z_{ij} < 1.96$).

In summary, the amounts of organic direct sales can reach those of organic products sold in supermarkets. Besides, such form of marketing is beneficial to both parties involved: the farmers get more income and faster as well as gain some experience in this area, while the customers have additional guarantees for the quality of products.

4. Conclusions

Academic and scientific literature suggests that direct sales are one of the most important and acceptable marketing channels for organic food products.

The survey of consumers showed that organic food sales at farmers' markets are growing rapidly, but so far the greater part of these products is sold in supermarkets.

Even 66% of the purchasers trust in the quality of organic products bought at specialized farmers' markets: the younger consumers (under 40 years old) trust more in specialized farmers' markets than in supermarkets, while the older consumers trust in both organic farmers' markets and supermarkets alike. Regardless of family income level, the majority of the respondents accept direct sales at specialized farmers' markets. However, requested stricter control of the quality shows the necessity to undertake additional measures in order to improve the image of these markets.

Even 82% of the respondents support the idea to sell organic food products at specialized farmers' markets. The higher consumers' confidence in farmers' markets and the approval of the majority of the purchasers to sell organic food products through this trade channel suppose the need to develop a direct marketing system.

References

[1] M. Truninger, Exploring trust in organic food consumption, Joint Organic Congress, Odense, Denmark [Online], May 30-31, 2006, http://orgprints.org/7512/.

[2] F. Schneider, M. Stolze, A. Kriege-Steffen, J. Lohscheidt, H. Boland, How can consumer trust in organic products be enhanced? EurSafe 2009, Nottingham, United Kingdom, July 2-4, 2009, in: K. Millar, P.H. West, B. Nerlich (Eds.), Ethical Futures: Bioscience and Food Horizons, Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2009.

[3] S. Padel, P. Midmore, Organic Marketing Initiatives and Rural Development: Summary of results and conclusions. Presentation of EU research results to the Standing Committee for Organic Farming, Brussels [Online], Mar. 12, 2007, http://orgprints.org/10652/.

[4] L. Zaks, Statisticheskoe Ocenivanie, Statistika, Moscow, 1976, p. 598. (in Russian)

[5] M. Henchion, P. O'Reilly, C. Cowan, Organic food in Ireland: A supply chain perspective, Irish Journal of Management 23 (2) (2002) 31-51.

[6] D. Mikelionytė, I. Lukošiutė, L. Petrauskaitė, Promotion of direct marketing of agricultural and food products in compliance with consumers' priority, Management Theory and Studies for Rural Business and Infrastructure Development 22 (3) (2010) 122-130. (in Lithuanian)

[7] M. Lobley, M. Reed, A. Butler, P, Courtney, M. Warren, The Impact of Organic Farming on the Rural Economy in England, Final Report to DEFRA, Centre for Rural Research, University of Exeter, UK, 2005.

[8] J. PyysiÃµinen, A. Anderson, G. McElwee, K. Vesala, Developing the entrepreneurial skills of farmers: Some myths explored, International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research 12 (1) (2006) 21-39.

[9] R. Kratochvil, H. Leitner, The trap of conventionalisation: Organic Farming between Vision and Reality, Paper for Working Group 5 at the XXI Congress of the ESRS, Aug. 22-27, 2005, Keszthely, Hungary.

[10] R. Zanoli, The European Consumer and Organic Food, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 2004, p. 175.

[11] C. Günden, B. Türkekul, B. Miran, C. Abay, S. Akgüngör, Consumer preferences for purchase places of organic fruits and vegetables in Turkey, Journal of Food, Agriculture and Environment 8 (1) (2010) 144-149.

[12] S. Padel, Local and/or Organic: A balancing of values for producers and customers [Online], http://orgprints.org/8853/1/Padel_Local_organic_COR2006.pdf.

[13] V. Rutkovienė, G. Garliauskienė, Demand of organic products, Agricultural Sciences 14 (2) (2007) 66-71. (in Lithuanian)

[14] V. Skulskis, V. Girgždienė, Consumption of organic food products and related information sources in Lithuania, Agricultural Sciences 16 (3-4) (2009) 154-161. (in Lithuanian)

[15] M. Mellin, A. Spiller, A. Zühlsdorf, From field to plate: Farmer-to-consumer direct marketing for organic and regional products, Paper at: Zwischen Tradition und Globalisierung-9, Wissenschaftstagung Ökologischer Landbau, Universität Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Deutschland [Online], Mar. 20-23, 2007, http://orgprints.org/9671/.

[16] D. Pearson, J. Henryks, Marketing organic products: Exploring some of the pervasive issues, Journal of Food Products Marketing 14 (4) (2008) 95-108.

[17] A.M. Nikodemska-Wołowik, Organic farming brand identity: Meeting trends, building trust, Pecvnia 8 (2009) 263-275.

[18] L. Lev, L. Gwin, Filling in the gaps: Eight things to recognize farm-direct marketing, Coices 25 (1) (2010) 13-18.

[19] C.D. Adams, M.J. Salois, Local versus organic: A turn in consumer preferences and willingness-to-pay, Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems 25 (4) (2010) 331-341.

[20] T.A. Park, L. Lohr, The influence of local selling decisions on organic farm incomes, Journal of Agricultural and Food Industrial Organization 8 (1) (2010) 1-19.

[21] O. Flaten, G. Lien, M. Koesling, A.K. Loes, Norwegian farmers ceasing certified organic production: Characteristics and reasons, Journal of Environmental Management 91 (2010) 12.

[22] W. Luczka-Bakula, J. Smoluk-Sikorska, Sales on organic farms in Poland, Beiträge zur 10 Wissenschaftstagung Ökologischer Landbau, Zürich [Online], Feb. 11-13, 2009, http://orgprints.org/14325/.

[23] J. Ramanauskienė, A. Gargasas, Opportunities and prospects for organic products supply to the market and realization, Management Theory and Studies for Rural Business and Infrastructure Development 12 (1) (2008) 142-151. (in Lithuanian)

[24] V. Skulskis, Modelling the Determinants of Organic Farming, Doctoral Dissertation (03S), ISM University of Management and Economics, Kaunas, 2010. (in Lithuanian)

[25] R. Stukas, G. Šurkienė, R. Dubakienė, R. Nagytė, M. Baranauskas, Consumption and assessment of organic food by adult residents of Vilnius (Lithuania), Ecology 56 (1-2) (2010) 17-25.

[26] K. Zander, U. Hamm, B. Freyer, K. Gössinger, S. Naspetti, S. Padel, et al., Consumer concerns regarding

additional ethical attributes of organic food, in: Organic is Life: Knowledge for Tomorrow, ISOFAR, Bonn [Online], 2011, pp. 22-24, http://orgprints.org/19775/1/177.pdf.

[27] S. Padel, K. Gössinger, Farmer Consumer Partnerships. Communicating Ethical Values: A Conceptual Framework. CORE Organic Project Report, Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth & University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria [Online], 2008, http://orgprints.org/12821/.

[28] K. Zander, U. Hamm, Consumer preferences for additional ethical attributes of organic food, Food Quality and Preference 21 (5) (2010) 495-503.