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## “Healthier and with Better Natural Flavor” Who Purchases Organic Foods and Why?

For years, organic food consumption has ceased being simply a fad among small groups of environmentally committed consumers. Due, in particular, to the numerous scandals related to foodstuff production, the number of consumers in Europe, Canada, and the United States that are demanding safer, better tasting, and ecologically sustainable food is in constant growth. In the industrialized countries, the demand for organic foods, in contrast to the conventional foodstuff market, is undergoing annual growth at rates of 9% (Germany), 15% (Canada), and 19% (Switzerland). For the same reason, in many countries most of the larger supermarket chains have introduced an organic line of vegetables, fruits, dairy products, and most recently, meats. There are also some restaurant chains and hospital or business cafeterias, and some airlines that produce between 500 and 10,000 meals a day, adding to this demand. The Lufthansa cafeteria, for example, is supplied with organic potatoes and once a week offers a completely organic dish. Swissair offers exclusively organic foods.

In quantitative terms, Germany is the largest market and the one with the most organic product consumers in Europe. However, in smaller countries such as Denmark, Switzerland, and Sweden, the number of consumers requesting organic products is proportionally larger. Therefore, in these countries, organic product market share in the total foodstuff market is also greater.

Let's look at some of the market characteristics. According to a survey by ZMP in Germany, a semi-public market research organization, the average consumer of organic products in that country is 31 years old and lives in a household with children. Organic products in Germany are more expensive than conventional ones, in the case of fruits and vegetables, as much as 30% to 50% greater, in the case of meats and sausages, between 50% and 70%. Due to the high prices of organic products, most of the regular consumers come from a social stratum with high levels of income and education. In November of 2000, 14% of all consumers declared that they purchased organic products occasionally, 8% "frequently" and 7% very frequently. On the average, those interviewed said that their expenditures for organic products constituted 13% of their total foodstuff expenditures. The most important reason for purchasing organic foods for German consumers is their health, followed by "their more natural flavor". The "mistrust" factor for the use of agro-chemicals has fallen to third place.

The surveys carried out in European countries and the United States and Canada confirm the apparent trends (see: and or ). Among the most sought after products are eggs (70%), followed by vegetables (46%) and fruits (42%). Only between 4% and 11% of the organic purchasers indicate that they purchase organic meats. This is due possibly to the scant availability of meat and the fact that it was not until the year 2000 that the European Union issued legislation for certification of animal products.

In recent years, another strong trend has been identified. As reported by the journal Biofach/Biopress ([www.biopress.de](http://www.biopress.de)), the publication of the world's largest organic product fair, the demand for processed organic products, such as pastas, sauces, granola, bouillon cubes, sweets, and frozen dinners, that fall in the "bio" quality, is growing enormously. With regard to purchasing points, a majority of the consumers acquires organic products in supermarkets (45%) and in farmers' markets (41%), less frequently in organic product specialty stores (35%) and in greengrocers (24%); most consumers effect their purchases in three different locales and in this order of preference.

In Canada, the consumer picture is very similar. According to a study carried out by Agriculture, Food, and Rural Development, of Alberta, drafted in collaboration with

"Economic and Competitiveness Information", most Canadian organic consumers are between 35 and 55 years of age. In Canada, however, there is significant growth in younger consumers. In fact, most of the regular consumers of organic foodstuffs in Canada (18% of the population, although 22% says that they purchase them occasionally) are women (60%) and are highly educated. The study says that, "The greater the educational level of the persons interviewed, the greater the probability that they will be organic consumers". With regard to income levels, the survey points out that the group of "consumers" is broken into two parts. Those that are classic consumers, i.e., "those having a commitment to ecological products as a part of their life style", who tend to have lower income levels. On the other hand, the new consumers have higher income levels and "are committed to products related to their personal health". Thus, it would not appear appropriate to work with averages.

Furthermore, in Canada, organic products are purchased in large supermarkets (49%) and specialty shops for the sale of healthy and natural products (48%), followed by grocery stores, or large stores (31%).

In the United States, we find exactly the same percentage of organic purchasers as in Germany. Thirty-one percent of all consumers indicate that they purchase organic products from frequently to sporadically. However, the profile of the purchasers is different. In the United States, as in Canada, there is a large number of young, under-30 purchasers, which continues to increase. Their principal interest is their health, followed by flavor; in third place, they say they want to protect the environment.

In Costa Rica, as in the industrialized countries, regular consumers have high educational levels, with elevated monthly family incomes. Organic products are acquired in farmers' markets, supermarkets and organic fairs (See: CEDECO: Demanda, oportunidades de mercado e intención de consumo de productos orgánicos. San José, 2001). In contrast to Europe and the United States, a high percentage (54%) of those interviewed say that they consume organic products, i.e., they belong to the group of those who eventually or regularly consume organic foodstuffs. This figure, according to our interpretation, has to do with the price of organic fruits and vegetables, which in many cases, and for various reasons, do not differ much from the prices of conventional agriculture. The regular consumers (interviewed at organic fairs) point out that organic foods have a favorable impact on their health and have a positive relationship with the environment. However, the same study indicates that the organic.