

## Ecological label only favours lesser-valued food products

Products labelled as organic are those which have been produced ecologically. A study by the University of Jaen concludes that the labelling favours products which are not considered to be of high quality, based on the analysis of olive oil.

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Organic food has a 1% market share in Spain, a figure way off that of other countries such as Denmark, Austria and Switzerland. / Sinc - Olmo Calvo.

One of the strategies which farmers have applied to make their products stand out and increase their value in the eyes of the consumer is to sell food labelled as organic or ecological.

In Spain, the area cultivated for organic farming quadrupled between 1999 and 2010, making it the country with the greatest surface area dedicated to this type of production in the whole of the European Union and the fifth worldwide.

However, the demand for this type of product has not increased in the same way. Organic food has a 1% market share, a figure way off that of other

countries such as Denmark, Austria and Switzerland, with more than 70% of Spain's ecological production being exported.

Research by the University of Jaen has investigated what makes a product with this type of labelling succeed in the market, using olive oil as a case study.

"The term 'organic' evokes quality or superiority for consumers. In this sense, we have observed that as the extent to which the conventional product is considered to be good increases, the added plus that it is ecological means less," explains Manuela Vega-Zamora, lead author of the study.

Therefore, for highly-valued products such as virgin olive oil, the positive connotations of the word 'organic' do not provide any extra interest for the consumer.

"Although some studies show that ecological food is healthier, this characteristic is not demonstrated scientifically"

"This is an iconic food in Spain. Therefore, the ecological attribute is less valued because consumers consider that its processing is sophisticated and already has an identity," adds the researcher.

### **Is ecological food healthier?**

According to the regulation on production and labelling of ecological products, this type of production is a general agricultural management system and combines the best environmental practices, a high level of biodiversity, conservation of natural resources, application of demanding standards for animal welfare and production in line with preferences of certain consumers for products obtained from natural substances and processes.

"Although some studies show that ecological food is healthier, this characteristic is not demonstrated scientifically, or at least, there is no written consensus that this is the case. However, it is agreed that the food is produced with respect for the environment.

Qualitative methodology employed for this study, with discussion groups formed of young people aged between 25 and 35 years old and couples aged between 30 and 55 years old with children, from Seville and Madrid.

#### References:

Manuela Vega-Zamora, Manuel Parras-Rosa y Francisco José Torres-Ruiz  
“Exploring the ‘organic’ attribute in the perception of iconic foods The case of olive oil in Spain” *Agriculture* 42 (4): 273–000 doi: 10.5367/oa.2013.0146

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