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Regional Conditions of the Ecological Goods Market¹

Summary

The interest of consumers and producers with organic food is increasing. This justifies the need to identify the main determinants of the development of the organic food market. The literature on the organic food market contains many references to the factors that influence both consumers and producers to turn towards organic food. Nevertheless, there is the need to explore the problem in terms of regional conditions. Among the factors influencing consumers' decisions about organic products are those that result from health or environmental concerns. Taking into account the producers' motives for switching to organic food production methods, a special attention is paid to subsidies as well as to the protection of the environment or the quality of food. The authors of this paper attempted to take account of regional conditions for the development of organic products, indicating the importance of actions undertaken at the regional level. The paper drew a particular attention to the opportunities and barriers to the regional development of the organic food market on the example of Lubuskie Voivodeship. They also focused on developing solutions for green farmers to better tailor their offerings to the needs and preferences of current and future customers. In the research proceedings, the analysis of literature, the statistical data, and the results of the questionnaire surveys concerning the presented issues were used. The aim of the undertaken research was to determine the conditions of the regional market for organic products on the example of Lubuskie Voivodeship. The study shows that the majority of people purchasing organic food are city dwellers, but those who live in the countryside also make purchases. Most of the respondents have knowledge about the requirements for organic food regarding its production and processing. The preferred place for the purchase of organic products by the majority of respondents is marketplaces, while the most common source of information used during their purchase is their own experience. The article is of the research nature.

Key words: organic food, regional conditions, organic producers, consumer behaviour.

JEL codes: Q56

Introduction

It is generally accepted that our food habits are largely shaped during childhood, and that they evolve because of the changing circumstances and experiences that we acquire in our way (Pearson, Henryks, Jones 2011, p. 171), as well as the patterns directly addressed

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to us. The growing number of scientific studies indicates a clear increase in consumer interest in the nutritional value and nutritional value of food. In this context, much attention is paid to the issue of organic food and to the perception of it as being more delicious and of higher nutritional value compared to conventional food. According to numerous studies, consumers prefer organic food for a number of reasons, such as health and environmental and food quality issues (Pearson, Henryks, Jones 2011, p. 171-177; Hughner et al. 2007, p. 94-110). Proactive consumers believe that organic food will have a positive effect on their health, well-being, as it is healthier than conventional foods. Conversely, some consumers buy organic food as a response to an unfavorable health situation because, for example, they have someone in the family who is sick and believes that organic food can help them recover (Pearson, Henryks, Jones 2011, p. 171). One of the greatest threats to sustainable development is that of conventional industrial agriculture due to the high consumption of industrial inputs and very low labor input (Zepeda, Nie 2012, p. 467-480). As already mentioned, the quality of the consumer's choice of organic food has been important. At the same time, Pearson, Henryks, Sultan, and Anisimova (2013, p. 61) show that from a demographic point of view young, educated people, as well as students are the most loyal purchasers of organic food.

Understanding the changing needs of consumers is an extremely important element in building a competitive advantage for companies operating on the market. The ability to tailor the offer to the needs and expectations of customers is key to the success of companies that have recently begun to emphasize how healthy their products are, the ecologically productive way of producing food, and the quality management and food safety systems they use, using environmental marketing instruments.

Creation of competitive advantage of enterprises is achieved by proper application of ecological marketing. Companies can undertake various activities in the area of environmental marketing, i.e. all marketing activities aimed at producing, distributing and promoting products and ideas related to environmental protection (Pilarczyk, Nestorowicz 2010, p. 28). Promoting and meeting the requirements of ecological consumption is not only an important means of increasing the competitiveness of enterprises but also the key to solving the environmental crisis (Lin, Chen 2016, p. 1088).

Undoubtedly, the use of marketing in the organic food market gives the market a lot of benefits, and the right choice of marketing instruments largely depends on the people to whom they are directed. The following types of consumers can be distinguished according to the level of ecological awareness, which affects their behavior and demand for organic products (Banytė, Brazionienė, Gadeikienė 2010, p. 379):

- Black consumers - have low levels of environmental awareness, lack of knowledge about environmental relationships, and believe that individual consumer behavior does not affect the ecological balance; make purchases by advertising, choose non-durable, disposable and toxic products; Typical for these consumers is the inefficient use of energy, water, gas and other resources;
- Gray consumers - their level of involvement in environmental protection is low, they are convinced that the current environmental protection system is not sufficient and that im-

provements should be left to public institutions, so they believe that individual consumer behavior does not impact on the state of the environment; Their environmental awareness is at an average level, they seldom buy ecological products, usually under the influence of random information and tend to buy the same products as black consumers; they save resources for economic reasons;

- Greyish green consumers - they have a high level of environmental awareness, buy environmentally-friendly products, buy health-oriented products, are driven by snobbery, rarely test the credibility of product information; save resources for economic, health or snobbish reasons;
- Green consumers - have a very high level of ecological awareness; they buy environmentally friendly products of the highest quality in ecological packages; consider that the environment is one of the main factors affecting human health; use resources economically.

Each of these types of consumers requires a separate treatment and personalized approach. It is important to divide these groups, as both the needs and the behavior of the market are diverse. For the first two types of consumers, i.e. black consumers and gray consumers, there is a need to awaken and develop positive attitudes toward organic food. In this case, it is important to highlight the benefits of organic food and its high quality. For the last two groups it is important to establish relationships and maintain them through the use of instruments to shape and sustain loyalty to organic food products.

In addition to these types of customers, there are also groups of people who refrain from buying organic food, for example due to price barriers or lack of a local organic food store (spatial barriers). It is worth noting here that organic food prices are significantly higher than conventional food prices due to the higher quality of food produced by organic methods.

The aim of the research was to determine the conditions of the regional market for organic products on the example of Lubuskie voivodship. An attempt was made to show the marketing activities which, in the long run, can bring many benefits to the market. The study looked for answers to the following research problems:

- conditions of the regional market for organic products,
- determination of the consumer's food profile,
- knowledge of the requirements of organic food,
- knowledge of the term „organic food“,
- the reasons for non-purchase of organic food by the respondents,
- places to buy organic food,
- most frequently used sources of information by respondents during purchases of organic food.

The realization of the indicated objective and formulated research questions will be facilitated by the presentation of survey results among inhabitants of Lubuskie voivodship.

The research allowed us to create a profile of the consumer of organic food so that we could develop solutions for organic farmers to better tailor the offer to the needs and preferences of present and future customers.

Material and methodology of research

A questionnaire survey was conducted from May to September 2016. The selection of respondents was random with the use of stratified selection method. In total, 541 questionnaires were collected, 500 of them correctly completed, and the figures included in these questionnaires were further analyzed (Table 1). Of the 500 respondents in the survey, about 40% did not purchase organic food, including 119 women (over 60%) and 79 men (about 40%).

Table 1
Characteristics of the test sample

Specification	Respondents	
	Number	Procent
Gender of Respondents		
Female	318	63.6
Male	182	36.4
Residence		
City	238	47.6
Village	262	52.4
Education		
Vocational	14	2.8
Secondary	226	45.2
Higher	260	52.0
Income per person in the household		
Below 500 zł net	28	5.6
500-1000 zł net	150	30.0
1001-1500 zł net	121	24.2
1501-2000 zł net	137	27.4
2001-2500 zł net	43	8.6
2501-3000 zł net	0	0.0
3001-3500 zł net	21	4.2

Source: own calculations based on research.

Profile of the consumer of organic food in the light of empirical research

The question is: what is the profile of the consumer of organic food? As it turns out from the survey of 302 people buying organic food, prevalent are urban dwellers (63%), but the purchase is also made by people living in rural areas (37%). 55% of the respondents eat this type

of product once a week. Consumers of organic products are people with secondary (32%) and higher education (68%). Purchasers are mainly women, while men - definitely less. The highest percentage of respondents (40%) declared monthly income per person in the household in the range of 1501-2000 zł net. Studies show that both age ranges 37-46 and 26-36, as well as household size (3 to 4 persons), favor consumption patterns for organic food.

The research results

The results of the study show that most respondents have knowledge about the requirements of organic food production and processing and have correctly indicated what they understand by a processed organic product (Table 2). However, not everyone is aware that it should be marked with special characters. It is worth noting here that every thirteenth respondent was aware of the fact that organic food should be produced and processed by organic methods in farms and processing plants certified and controlled by certifying bodies, as well as marked with special characters. On the other hand, a processed organic product is considered to be ecologically processed by processing methods that guarantee compliance with the organic production principle and maintain the essential characteristics of the product at all stages of production.

Table 2
Requirements for organic food

Specification	Number of indications	Percentage of indications [%]	Percentage of respondents* [%] (n = 500)
Should be produced and processed by organic methods in farms and processing plants certified and controlled by certification bodies.	445	45.9	89.0
Should be marked with special characters	166	17.1	33.2
A processed organic product is considered to be ecologically processed by processing methods that guarantee compliance with organic production and maintain the essential characteristics of the product at all stages of production	322	33.2	64.4
All of the above	36	3.8	7.2
Total	969	100,0	-

The share of respondents does not add up to 100%, respondents could give more than one answer.
Source: as in Table 1.

According to the analysis of the results of the empirical study, 43% of respondents think that the term organic food is the same as healthy food, while 32% associate it with natural food. 14% of respondents stated that both concepts refer to organic food. The rest of the

respondents agreed that these concepts are not related to organic food. In the light of these data on the labeling of organic food, it is not surprising that respondents consider the term organic food to be the same as healthy or natural food, or that they treat both concepts as synonyms of organic food. The inability to distinguish these concepts may be due to the fact that it is commonly accepted that organic food is healthy, but vice versa does not need to be such a dependency because the product does not need to be certified. It should also be noted that respondents associate organic food with health and natural foods, but most respondents do not associate it with an ecological quality assurance product.

According to the study, about 40% of people surveyed do not purchase organic food. Of particular importance is the understanding of the reasons why respondents do not buy organic products. Undoubtedly, an important factor influencing consumers' decisions, apart from the price, is still the availability of organic food due to the lack of a shop near the place of residence (Table 3).

Table 3
The main reasons for non-purchase of organic food by the respondents

Specification	The main reasons for non-purchase of organic food by the respondents				
	Female		Male		Total percentage of indications [%]
	Number	Procent	Number	Procent	
Price too high	71	59.7	35	44.3	53.5
No organic food store near the place of residence	48	40.3	23	29.1	35.9
Difficulties in purchasing it	0	0.0	14	17.7	7.1
No preference for organic food intake	0	0.0	4	5.1	2.0
Other reasons, including:	0	0.0	3	3.8	1.5
- limited offer	0	0.0	1	1.3	0.5
- not realizing the benefits	0	0.0	2	2.5	1.0
Total	119	100.0	79	100.0	100.0

Source: as in Table 1.

One of the most important reasons for not purchasing organic food is the high price of these products (the percentage of indications - over 53%). Almost every third respondent encounters barriers to the availability of organic food due to the lack of an organic food store near their place of residence, and almost every fourteenth have declared difficulty in acquiring it. Other reasons indicated by the respondents are the limited offer of organic food (the percentage of indications - 0.5%) and the non-perception of the benefits of buying organic food (1%). Nearly every fiftieth person does not prefer organic food. It should also be noted that there were clear percentages in the indications of the reasons for non-purchase of organic food by respondents of different sexes. The study found that women more often than men

indicated excessive price. These differences may be due to the fact that women according to Central Statistical Office data on average receive about 21% lower wages than men. The average monthly gross wage of men in 2014 was 20.6% higher than the average monthly gross wage of women (Doniec et al. 2016). Men, in addition to too high prices and lack of a shop near their place of residence, pointed out, among the reasons for not purchasing organic food, the difficulties in acquiring it and non-preference of food from organic farming. At the same time, this may be due to the fact that women are more engaged in the search for organic food and have greater confidence in organic producers because they are more likely to shop than men. Indications for the lack of preference for organic food consumption for men may be due to the perception that it is increasing the risk of foodborne illnesses, i.a. the use of ecological production system.

After asking the respondents about the place of purchase of organic food it can be said that the respondents are most interested in the market (number of indications - 253). Followed by health food stores (number of indications - 168). In turn, every 4 respondents go to buy organic food to large-space stores (including: supermarkets, hypermarkets and discount stores), and almost every 12 respondents - to the housing estate store. The least popular as the place of purchase of products from organic farming and breeding is the on-line shop (number of indications - 23), followed by directly from the producer (number of indications - 45).

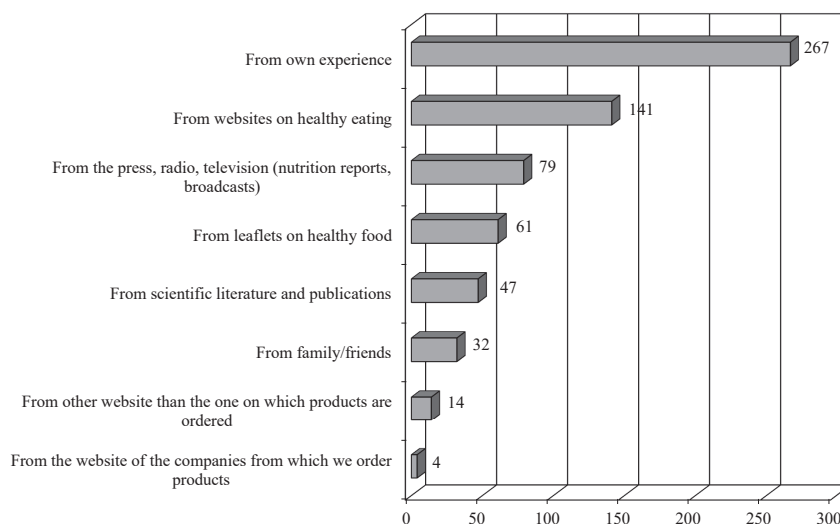
Also noteworthy are the sources of information about organic food (chart 1). The acquisition and analysis of market information by the consumer is an important component of any decision-making process, and in the face of continuous information acquisition, it is not the information itself, but the selection of those that may be useful (Zrałek 2010, p. 143).

The most common source of information used when shopping for organic food is the respondents' own experience (the number of indications - 267), followed by internet sites on healthy eating, while the third was the mass media such as the press, radio, television, including reportages on nutrition. Almost every fifth respondent uses information from leaflets, and every sixth from literature and scientific publications. In sixth place was information from family/friends, while the seventh place was a different website than the one where the surveyees purchased organic products. The rarest source of information was the site where respondents order products. It is worth noting that this is the least used source of information, probably due to the fact that only a small percentage of respondents order organic food products via the internet (about 8%). Nevertheless, the internet is a popular source of information, as it ranked second in terms of using information sources in the purchase of organic food products. Changes in the market, especially with regard to the internet, on the one hand do not affect the course of the management process among the entrepreneurs, and on the other hand, the behavior of consumers (Kułyk, Michałowska 2016, p. 239).

At this point, it is worth mentioning that online sales strategies focus on two aspects (Barska 2014, p. 369): first of all, to convince a customer to buy at all via a new technology (the internet), and secondly, to deepen relations with the client to gain his trust and loyalty.

Chart 1

The most commonly used sources of information by respondents when purchasing organic food



Source: own study based on the research.

Creating and maintaining relationships with customers is an important element in achieving a competitive advantage, and by creating and maintaining them, the customer obtains new value that leads to gaining benefits by loyal customers (Michałowska, Kotylak, Danielak 2015, s. 60).

On the basis of the observations made, the data from secondary sources and the results of the survey, we can indicate the opportunities and barriers to the development of the consumption of organic food. Among the opportunities stand out:

- increased interest in eco-food and improved quality of life, including a healthy lifestyle,
- increasing number of stores offering a wide range of organic products,
- whereas among barriers one can distinguish,
- economic downturn of the country,
- low level of ecological awareness of Polish consumers,
- unwillingness to change eating habits.

Perception of organic food as increasing the risk of foodborne illnesses due to the use of ecological production system.

- unwillingness to change preferences towards sustainable consumption,
- constant persistence of buying conventional foods.

There is no doubt that the chance for the development of the organic food market is to raise the level of ecological awareness in which the impact on choices for the natural envi-

ronment and the fate of present and future generations is perceived. At this point, it is worth noting that support is available in the form of subsidies or various types of facilities for organic producers as well as professional advice.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, the success of each company determines the needs and preferences of consumers. In the development of organic food, it is important to tailor the offer to the needs of the customers and to inform them accordingly. The use of environmental marketing instruments becomes an important element in the activities of producers and farms. The set of marketing instruments depends on the types of consumers according to the level of environmental awareness. Depending on the level of this awareness, consumers will be more or less inclined to buy organic food. In addition, it is important to recognize the reasons for the resignation of organic food. In the situation of abandoning the products due to the high prices or the reduced availability of the organic food market, marketing activities are of particular importance. In this case, it is important to emphasize the high quality of these products as well as the benefits that it brings.

It is worth noting here that it is evident from the research conducted that among the most important causes of non-purchase of organic food is the high price and availability caused by lack of a shop near the respondent's residence. One respondent pointed to a limited offer of organic food, and two did not see the benefits of buying organic food, which was linked to a reluctance to pay higher prices for organic and farm products. While the latter can be rapidly eliminated by properly informing about the benefits of organic food, it is more difficult and definitely costly to diversify the offer of organic food or to start trading in the vicinity of the respondents' residence. Increasing the structure of the organic food offer would involve finding additional sources of supply, which would lead to increased distribution costs. On the other hand, taking up commercial activity near the respondent's place of residence is related to the interest of persons who undertake such commercial activity and fulfill all the formal and legal requirements in this respect. Proper selection of marketing instruments can be a source of growth and a sustainable competitive advantage for producers and farms.

It is predicted that in the future interest in organic food will continue to grow. The analysis of the research results allowed to indicate the regional conditions of the organic products market, as well as to develop proposals for solutions for organic agricultural producers that would better adapt the offer to the requirements and preferences of current and future customers. These results can be a valuable hint for those interested in the organic food market. In the opinion of the authors, it is necessary in the future to conduct research on future trends in the development of the organic food market in the Lubuskie Voivodeship, so as to create recommendations in this area for various participants of the organic food market.

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Uwarunkowania regionalne rynku produktów ekologicznych

Streszczenie

Zainteresowanie konsumentów i producentów żywnością ekologiczną zwiększa się. Uzasadnia to potrzebę zidentyfikowania głównych uwarunkowań rozwoju rynku produktów ekologicznych. Literatura dotycząca rynku żywności ekologicznej zawiera wiele odniesień do czynników wpływających na zainteresowanie zarówno konsumentów, jak i producentów żywnością ekologiczną. Niemniej jednak zachodzi potrzeba zgłębienia problemu w aspekcie uwarunkowań regionalnych. Wśród czynników wpływających na decyzje konsumentów dotyczące produktów ekologicznych wymienia się te wynikające z troski o zdrowie czy też dbałości

o środowisko naturalne. Biorąc pod uwagę motywę przechodzenia producentów na metody ekologicznej produkcji szczególną uwagę zwraca się na dopłaty, a także na ochronę środowiska czy jakość żywności. Autorzy opracowania podjęli próbę uwzględnienia uwarunkowań regionalnych w rozwoju produktów ekologicznych wskazując znaczenie działań podejmowanych na poziomie regionalnym. W opracowaniu szczególną uwagę zwrócono na możliwości i bariery regionalnego rozwoju rynku żywności ekologicznej na przykładzie województwa lubuskiego. Skoncentrowano się również na opracowaniu propozycji rozwiązań dla ekologicznych producentów rolnych pozwalających lepiej dostosować ofertę do wymagań oraz preferencji obecnych i przyszłych klientów. W postępowaniu badawczym wykorzystano analizę literatury, danych statystycznych oraz wyniki przeprowadzonych badań ankietowych dotyczących przedstawianej problematyki. Celem podjętych badań było ustalenie uwarunkowań regionalnych rynku produktów ekologicznych na przykładzie województwa lubuskiego. Z przeprowadzonego badania wynika, że wśród osób dokonujących zakupu żywności ekologicznej przeważają mieszkańcy miast, ale zakupu dokonują też osoby mieszkające na wsi. Większość respondentów ma wiedzę na temat wymagań stawianych żywności ekologicznej dotyczących jej produkcji i przetwarzania. Preferowanym miejscem zakupu produktów ekologicznych przez większość respondentów są targowiska, zaś najczęstszym źródłem informacji wykorzystywanym podczas ich zakupu jest własne doświadczenie. Artykuł ma charakter badawczy.

Słowa kluczowe: żywność ekologiczna, uwarunkowania regionalne, producenci ekologiczni, zachowania konsumentów.

Kody JEL: Q56

Региональные обусловленности рынка экологических продуктов

Резюме

Интерес потребителей и производителей к экологическим пищевым продуктам повышается. Это обосновывает потребность в выявлении основных обусловленностей развития рынка экологических продуктов. Литература, касающаяся рынка экологической пищи, содержит много ссылок на факторы, влияющие на интерес как потребителей, так и производителей к экологической пище. Тем не менее есть необходимость глубже проникнуть в проблему в аспекте региональных обусловленностей. В числе условий, влияющих на решения потребителей насчет экологических продуктов, указывают те, которые вытекают из заботы о здоровье или же окружающей среде. Учитывая мотивы перехода производителей к методам экологического производства, особое внимание обращают на доплаты, а также на защиту среды или качество пищи. Авторы разработки попытались учесть региональные обусловленности в развитии экологических продуктов, указывая значение мер, принимаемых на региональном уровне. В статье особое внимание обратили на возможности и барьеры регионального развития рынка экологической пищи на примере Любушского воеводства. Сосредоточились также на разработке предложений решений для экологических сельскохозяйственных производителей, которые позволяют лучше приспособить предложение к требованиям и предпочтени-

ям нынешних и будущих клиентов. В исследовании использовали анализ литературы, статистических данных и результаты проведенных опросов, касающихся представляемой проблематики. Целью предпринятых исследований было определение региональных обусловленностей рынка экологических продуктов на примере Любушского воеводства. Проведенный опрос показывает, что среди лиц, покупающих экологическую пищу, преобладают городские жители, но покупки совершают и лица, проживающие на селе. Большинство респондентов располагает знаниями насчет требований, предъявляемых к экологической пище, которые касаются ее производства и переработки. Предпочитаемое большинством респондентов место покупки экологических продуктов – базары, самый же частый источник информации, используемый во время покупки их – личный опыт. Статья имеет исследовательский характер.

Ключевые слова: экологическая пища, региональные обусловленности, экологические производители, поведение потребителей.

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