

Analysis of Factors Affecting Agricultural Organic Products Diffusion Among Consumers: Perception of Extension Workers

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Abstract: Decades ago, agrochemicals were introduced aiming at enhancing crop yields and at protecting crops from pests. Due to adaptation and resistance developed by pests to chemicals, every year higher amounts and new chemical compounds are used to protect crops, causing undesired side effects and raising the costs of food production. The main purpose of this study was to explore factors affecting agricultural organic products (AOP) diffusion among Iranian consumers. A survey of 289 extension workers was conducted in Iran. To collect data, a questionnaire was designed. The study found that TV & radio were the most important AOP information delivery methods. Also results of exploratory factor analysis revealed that four factors determined about 59 percent of variations in diffusion of AOP: institutional (22.36 percent), cultural (16.28 percent), economic (10.24 percent) and production (9.81 percent).

Key words: Agricultural Organic Products (AOP) • Extension Workers • Perception • Diffusion • Iran

INTRODUCTIN

Agriculture is an important economic sector in developing countries such as Iran [1]. In the past two decades, growing environmental awareness in combination with concerns about safer foods have led people to question modern agricultural practices [2]. In response to concerns about conventional agricultural practices, food safety, human health concerns, [3-5] and environmental safety [6-9] interests in organically produced foods is increasing throughout the world. These concerns along with observed organic consumer behavior has led to emergence of various groups of organic consumers, namely environmentalists, food phobic's, healthy eaters, humanists, welfare enthusiasts and hedonists [10].

The most common definitions of an organically produced food emphasize product practices and principles used and the 'organic philosophy' [11-13]. Thus, while some definitions highlight dimensions such as 'bio- fair' or 'natural product systems' [13] and 'green' or 'environmental friendliness' [14], others emphasize the limited use of artificial chemicals in organic products [12], or its general philosophy [15]. According to

Stobbelaar *et al.*, [16] organic products is food produced without artificial fertilizer or chemical pesticides, nor containing artificial coloring, flavoring or aromatic substances, preservatives, or genetically modified ingredients.

Consumer actions regarding organic products stem from attitudes that in turn linked to a complex set of ideas, motivations and experiences [17]. Most of previous studies concluded that consumers purchase organic products because of a perception that such products are safer, healthier and more environmental friendly than conventionally produced alternatives [18].

Those studies designate how consumers perceive the organic concept, examining issues related to the demand for organic products, consumer attitudes and the factors that facilitate or hinder the acceptance of these products. The organic purchasing motives should be attribute to some environmental, ethical, quality, health consciousness and exploratory products buying behavior, as well as to specific products attributes such as nutrition, value, taste and price [6, 7, 10, 19-21].

Other consumer surveys demonstrate that, the major motive for buying organic products seems to be health-related [5,7,22-36]. Environmental concerns are apparently