

AN EVALUATION OF PRODUCTS IN ORGANIC MARKETS FROM THE CONSUMER'S POINT OF VIEW: THE CASE OF ISTANBUL

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ABSTRACT. In recent years, with the introduction of pandemics into human life, the thought that the immune system should be kept strong in society has become a current issue. As a result of the frequent mention that the best way to do this is through healthy nutrition and natural nutrition, people have started to search for organic products to protect their health and the health of their families and the sustainability of quality of life. In the past, reaching organic products required quite an effort, but nowadays, organic markets are established in districts. Istanbul is especially rich in organic markets, and it is a city that offers the opportunity to find at least one organic market close to almost every district. This study aims to evaluate organic products for visitors to 7 organic markets located in different districts of Istanbul's Asian and European sides from the consumer's point of view (Kadıköy, Sarıyer, Bakırköy, Kartal, Beylikdüzü, Küçükçekmece, and Şişli). The survey method was used in the study, and the reasons for consumers' preference for organic markets and the positive and negative of the markets were evaluated. Observations revealed that consumers generally come to the organic market twice a week (88.6%) with their private vehicles (49.5%) and spend approximately 1 hour (78.1%) there. While the participants often describe the products in the organic market as healthy, additive-free, and hormone-free, they stated that they buy organic products (84.3%) because they affect their physical health positively. Visitors to the organic market are negative about some issues; specifically, they stated that the products are expensive, the product variety is low, and the salespeople do not have enough information. As a result, it is important to ensure visitor satisfaction by eliminating existing problems to increase the use of organic markets and sustainability.

Keywords: *organic market, organic product, Istanbul-Türkiye, visitor, survey*

INTRODUCTION

Organic agriculture relies on nonchemical inputs and ecologically sustainable techniques of using the soil and maintaining control of weeds, pests, and diseases. The values of organic agriculture are a holistic view, sustainable cropping methods, respect for nature, that is, no use of chemicals as fertilizers and for disease, pest, and weed control, production of quality foodstuffs, and no use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), neither animals nor crops [1, 2, 3]. Organic agriculture connects new and old applications, protects the environment where all beings live in a shared manner, and strengthens the relationship between living beings thanks to the processes it involves [4, 5]. Looking at the world in general, it is known that the importance attached to personal health, especially the health of children and babies, is in the first place in consumers' demand for organic products. As a result, organic products have started to be preferred instead of chemicals in the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industry produced with advanced technology. Consumers have been aware of their environmental responsibilities. At the same time, they are increasingly aware of the health- and safety-related implications of the food they can buy in the market [6, 7, 8, 9]. Consumers' awareness of organic products due to the increase in their education level and their desire for a healthier life due to environmental problems are among the reasons for consuming organic products. Turkey's domestic market hasn't developed well due to the fact that it is a developing country, and its organic production

is directed towards the foreign market. Organic agriculture has emerged not to meet domestic market demand but for export purposes [10]. The factors effective in the inadequate development of the domestic market are differences in prices, inadequacy in product diversity, lack of extensive market research, undeveloped marketing network, and inadequacy of written and visual promotion activities [11]. To improve the state of the domestic sector, an organic open-air marketplace in Istanbul was introduced in June 2006. Being the liveliest city in Turkey and inhabiting more than one-fifth of the country's population, Istanbul is also where most of the consumption occurs. Istanbul is important in the Turkish economy and plays a major role in the commercial and industrial sectors. Istanbul has been a city of trade and production throughout the ages. Istanbul's value is increasing daily with its tourism sector, industry, and trade potential. Istanbul, which has a unique socio-economic structure in Turkey, is the country's capital of commerce, business, investment, finance and tourism. The share of Istanbul in Turkey's workforce is 20.3%, its share in exports is 50.6%, and its share in imports is 54.6%. Due to the high population of Istanbul, a large number of business lines, and the fact that it has the majority of the national income, it is a city where shopping is intense. Due to the high level of income and the educated and conscious people in Istanbul, the demand for organic products is at the highest level compared to other provinces. The high interest in organic products and the desire of organic producers to reach Istanbul consumers have come to the fore, and they deliver the products they grow to Istanbul consumers in various ways. For example, online sales, organic shopping places, and organic markets are some of them. Therefore, besides being a much-needed sales channel for farmers and a meeting place for farmers and consumers, this first organic marketplace mobilized the sector [12].

Today, along with the pandemic, besides being a much-needed sales channel for farmers and a meeting place for farmers and consumers, this first organic marketplace is established regularly in almost every city with the increasing interest in organic products. This situation made it necessary to question the potential of consumers in organic markets and their perspectives on products. Based on this hypothesis, this study addressed the user groups in the organic markets, the reasons for choosing organic markets, and the expectations and demands of the users from the organic market in the province of Istanbul (Kadıköy, Sarıyer, Bakırköy, Kartal, Beylikdüzü, Küçükçekmece, and Şişli), which has the largest share in Türkiye's food consumption, attracting attention with its population and socio-economic development.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research Material

The main material of the study is the organic markets in the province of Istanbul. Istanbul is a bridge connecting the continents of Europe and Asia. There is the Black Sea in the north of the city, the Marmara Sea in the south, the Bosphorus in the middle, in the northwest, the district of Saray in the province of Tekirdağ in the northwest, the districts of Çerkezköy and Çorlu in Tekirdağ in the west, Marmara Ereğlisi in Tekirdağ in the southwest, the district of Körfez in the province of Kocaeli in the east, the district of Kandıra in Kocaeli in the northeast, and the district of Gebze in Kocaeli in the southeast. Kocaeli district is adjacent to the Gebze districts of Kocaeli in the southeast. Istanbul is a metropolitan city with a strategic location where the Asian and European continents meet. The Bosphorus, which forms the strait from the Black Sea to the Marmara Sea, is one of the most important points of Türkiye. it connects many countries, with land, sea, and railway connections to every part of the country [13]. It is the most populous province of Türkiye, with a population of 15,840,900 people, and 18.71% of the population in the country resides in Istanbul [14].

The field of study consists of 7 organic markets located in different districts of the Asian and European sides of Istanbul. These are Kadıköy Municipality Organic Public Market, Sarıyer

Organic Public Market, Bakırköy Organic Public Market, Kartal Municipality Organic Public Market, Beylikdüzü Organic District Market, Küçükçekmece 100% Ecological Market, and Feriköy (Şişli) Organic Neighborhood Market.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire method was used in the study, and the questionnaires were composed of 25 open-ended and close-ended questions. In the survey, there are questions about the socio-economic structures of the participants, their use of organic markets, their views on organic products, their reasons for choosing organic markets, and the negative features of organic markets. A five-point Likert scale was used for the questions about the preferences of organic products, and the evaluation was based on grades of 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (do not agree), 3 (undecided), 4 (I agree), and 5 (I agree) [15, 16, 17, 18, 19].

Sampling and Data Evaluation

In determining the sample size in the study, considering the distribution of the markets in Istanbul and the user group that distinguishes them from those of other markets, it is possible to observe that the population will be changeable and cannot be known precisely, and for this purpose, it was determined as follows according to the formula given by Vural [20]:

$$n=t^2 pq/d^2$$

n: Sample size

p: The probability of the occurrence of the event of interest (p:0.10)

q: 1-p (probability of the event of interest not occurring) (q:0.90)

d: accepted \pm sampling error rate

t_(α ,sd): Critical value of t table according to the degree of freedom at the α significance level

The sample size was calculated as 138, and a total of 210 questionnaires 30 conducted in each market were conducted. The surveys were conducted face to face by randomly choosing among the people who visited the market [21, 8]. The data obtained from the questionnaires were evaluated using the Frequencies Analysis included in the SPSS 23 package program, and the relationships between the variables were determined and interpreted by Crosstabulation and Chi-square.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The General Profile of Organic Market Users

The results of the survey revealed that women preferred organic markets at 61.4% and by men at 38.6%. The study determined that the users were mostly between the ages of 31-40 at 31.0%, followed by users between the ages of 41-50 at 24.8%. Regarding education and profession, the study determined that 52.4% and 31.4% of those who come to the organic market are university graduates and private sector employees, respectively. Nevertheless, observations revealed that among people preferring the organic market, 20% of them were housewives, and 19.5% were retired. On the other hand, the study determined that 39.0% and 34.3% of those who came to organic markets, i.e., the majority, were individuals with a monthly income level of between TRY 10,001 and 30,000 (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequencies of socio-economic structure of the respondents

Users		F (%)	Users		F (%)
Gender	Female	61,4	Occupation	Officer	16,2
	Male	38,6		Private sector	31,4
Age	18-21	1,0		Self-employment	12,9
	22-25	1,4		Housewife	20,0
	26-30	8,6		Retired	19,5
	41-50	24,8		Number of members in the household	Single
	51-60	16,7	2 people	36,2	
	61 and above	16,5	More than 3 people	58,1	
Education	illiterate	-	Monthly Household Income (TL)	0-5 500	6,40
	Secondary school	9,0		5 501-10 000	6,40
	High school	36,2		10 001-20 000	24,00
	College graduate	52,4		20 001-30 000	28,00
	Graduate and above	2,4		30 001-40 000	26,00
				40 001 and above	9,20

The study determined that the number of individuals living in the family of those using the organic market is mostly three or more, with a rate of 58.1%. As a result of her study, Gürlü [22] determined that female consumers pay more attention to their health than male consumers and consume sustainable food, which parallels our study. Surret [23] stated that consumers often view organic products as luxury items. Consumers of organic products in Turkey generally have higher income levels, are more educated, live in urban areas, and are more conscious of their health. Organic products are available in large urban supermarkets/hypermarkets, in organic bazaars, and, to a lesser extent, in specialty stores or on the Internet. Wee et al. [24] indicated that the proportion of people consuming organic food rose with increased income. These people tended to be more highly educated than non-organic consumers. Sarıkaya [17] stated that the consumer profile that prefers organic products in Türkiye reveals that it generally consists of middle-aged and older consumers with a high education level and income. Since organic products exhibit an environmentally friendly attitude in the production, processing, distribution, and marketing phases, this encourages consumers to use these products.

The Usage of Organic Markets and Opinions

The survey results determined that 88.6% of the users come to the organic markets frequently, i.e., once a week, and 0.5%, which is the lowest rate, come to the organic markets at least once a year. Although users mostly come to the organic markets with their vehicles (49.5%), the study determined that 39.0% reach the organic market on foot, 4.3% by taxi, and 7.2% by public transportation. The results exhibit that 78.1% of the users – a great majority of them – spend 0-1 hour in the market, 19.5% 1-2 hours, and 2.4% 2-3 hours (Table 2).

Table 2. Usage Status of Organic Markets

	Expressions	F (%)
How often do you come to this market	Once a week	88,6
	Every 15 days	8,6
	Once a month	2,4
	Once a year	0,5
Mode of transportation	On foot	39,0
	By my own vehicle	49,5
	Taxi	4,3
	Public	7,2
Time spent transport	0-1 hour	11,20
	1-2 hour	71,20
	2-3 hour	15,20

Also, an evaluation of the people coming to the organic market reveals that 36% describe organic products as “healthy,” while 18% “additive-free,” 16% “hormone-free,” 15% “GMO-free,” 1% “drug-free” and 5% “certified product” (Fig. 1).

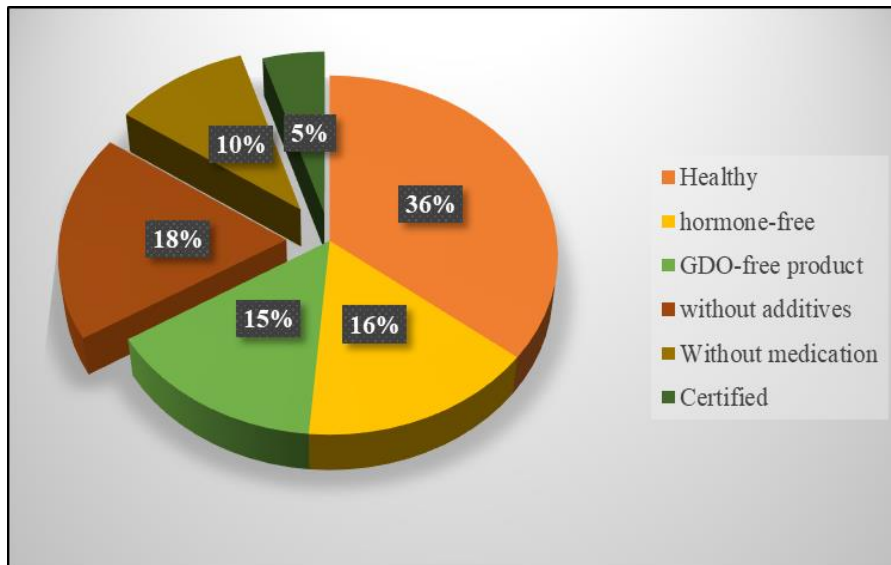


Fig. 1. Consumer evaluation of organic products

Douarin [25] stated that 66% of Canadians consuming organic products bought them every week. Generations Z and Y are the ones who buy the most organic products. In 2020, organic products represented 46% of generation Z's weekly purchases and 32% of generation Y's. Oliveira et al. [26] indicated that 61% of the people consuming organic products use their car to transport, and the most frequent travel time is between 31–60 min.

The Relationship between the Usage of Organic Markets and User Profile

Evaluations reveal that while the frequency of arrival and mode of transportation were related to education and monthly income, the time spent was related to age. Observations show that female participants between the ages of 31-40 and 41-50, university graduates with an income of TRY 20,001-40,000, come to the market more often (once a week). The study determined that the frequency of going to the market decreases as the income level decreases. On the other hand, while private sector employees said they visited the market once a week, those who visited the least were civil servants. Those who come to the market usually average 1-2 hours. The study determined that those who spend the most time are women, university graduates, and participants between the ages of 31-50. Housewives and retired people spend less time (0-1 hour) in the market (Table 3).

Table 3. The relationship between the use case of organic markets and the user profile

Status of usage	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Monthly Household Income (TL)
Frequency of coming to the organic market	0,707	0,110	0,000**	0,125	0,000**
Time spent in the market	0,533	0,002**	0,123	0,910	0,523
Mode of access to the market	0,069	0,135	0,000**	0,060	0,000**

Significant at the $p \leq **0,05$ level and $p \leq ***0,000$

Users' Reasons for Preferring Organic Markets

84.3% of the respondents stated, "I think organic products have a positive effect on my physical health," they indicated that as one of the main reasons for choosing organic markets. While the participants agreed with the statement, "I think organic products contribute to the protection of biodiversity," 49.0% and 14.3% stated they were hesitant. Also, while 83.3% of the participants strongly agree with the statement, "I think family members are fed better quality with the organic products I buy," 16.2% of them agree with it, and 0.5% of them were undecided. No participant answered, "I do not agree with these statements, and I strongly disagree" (Fig. 2).

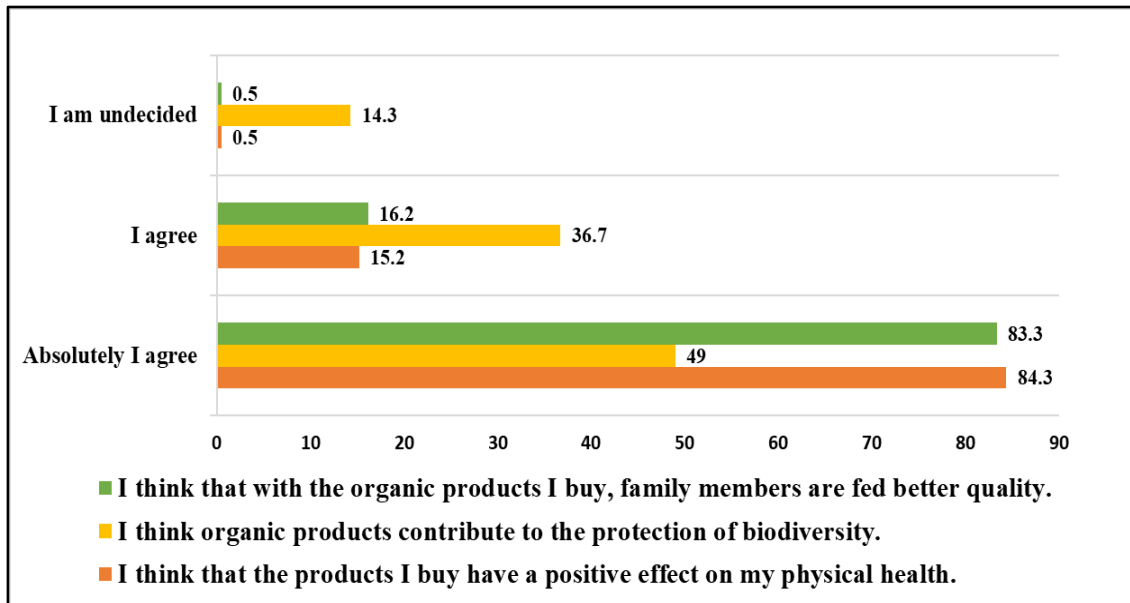


Fig. 2. Participants' reasons for choosing organic products

The survey results of Güngör [27] reveal the reasons for purchasing organic products from the participants, and the most common (93.7%) expression is "I buy organic products because they are more beneficial for my health." According to the research conducted by Whole Foods Market in the USA in 2005, the reasons why consumers prefer organic food products are 70% to avoid the effects of pesticides, 68% to believe that organic products are fresher, 67% to think that they are healthier and have higher nutritional values, and 55% to think foods are listed as genetically unmodified [28]. Malissiova et al. [29] stated that in terms of choice, Greeks believe that organic food is mainly safer, without strongly supporting their environmental aspect. An association of the respondents' reasons for choosing organic markets exhibits that the expressions were generally related to the monthly average income. While the participants with an income between TRY 20,001 and 40,000 stated that they strongly agreed with the statements, the study determined that some gave the "I do not agree" due to the decreased income level. Nevertheless, participants between 31-40 and 41-50 strongly agreed with the statement, "Coming to the organic market has a positive effect on my physical health," while those between the ages of 21-25 were undecided. While university graduates and private sector employees strongly agreed with the statements "Organic products contribute to the protection of biodiversity" and "provide better quality nutrition for family members", housewives, retired people, and primary school graduates stated that they were undecided (Fig. 3).

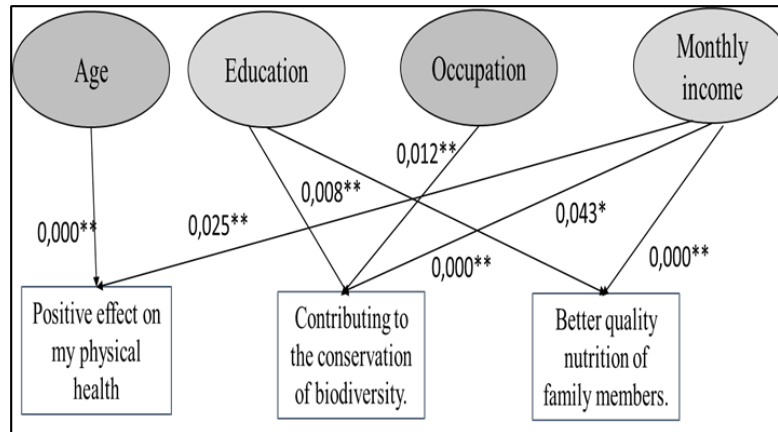


Fig. 3. User profile and organic product preference relationship

Mohamad et al. [30] said that a questionnaire survey was conducted in the townships of Subang Jaya and Shah Alam, and respondents are highly aware of organic food. They find organic food good for their health and intend to purchase organic food products for their families. Wee et al. [24] stated that health consciousness, environmentally friendly, and animal welfare considerations also drive the consumption of organic food products. Therefore, marketers of organic food products need to incorporate these objectives and drivers in their promotional materials to convince consumers to purchase the products. Malissiova et al. [29] indicated that various studies have concluded that organic products contain higher amounts of vitamin C, antioxidants, omega-3 fatty acids, and conjugated α -linolenic acid in milk. Also, fewer pesticide and cadmium residues have been determined in organic food than in conventional food. Ding et al. [31] stated that research has shown that all variables impact consumer purchase intentions to some extent. Food value, safety, and reviews all impact positive emotions, indirectly influencing consumers' purchase intentions.

Negative Aspects of Organic Markets

An evaluation of the statements about the negative aspects of organic markets reveals the visitors' views that while 38.6% disagreed with the statement "Products are expensive," 29.0% were undecided. While 49.5% of the participants agreed with the statement "Mixed arrangement of products," only 1.4% responded that they strongly disagreed. Besides, 65.7% agreed with the statement "Sales personnel do not have sufficient knowledge," and only 1.0% strongly disagreed. Moreover, 65.7% agreed with the expression "lack of product diversity," 2.4% strongly disagreed (Fig. 4).

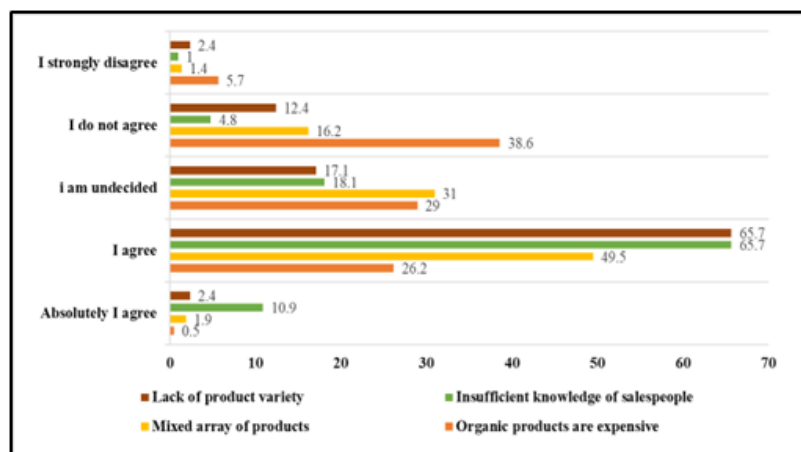


Fig. 4. Negative properties of organic products

Observations reveal that the negative features of organic markets are related to the user profile. The study determined that statements about negative traits are generally associated with age, education, and average income. Namely, participants in the 31-40 age range and with a high-income level (TRY 30,001 – 40,000 and above TRY 40,001) did not find organic products expensive, while self-employed people with an income of TRY 20,001 - 30,000 stated that they found it expensive. While university and high school graduates, private sector employees, and housewives stated that they did not agree with the expression “mixed array of organic products”, self-employed people stated that they were undecided. On the other hand, female participants, participants between the ages of 31-40, and university graduates did not agree with the statement that sales personnel do not have enough knowledge. High school graduates and some participants with income between TRY 30,001 and 40,000 said that they were undecided. While male participants generally did not agree with the statement “the lack of product variety in the organic market”, there are also undecided female participants. While the 31-40 and 41-50 age ranges, private sector employees, and retired participants did not agree with the same statement, the study determined that there were civil servant participants and those in the 31-40 age group who were undecided (Fig. 5).

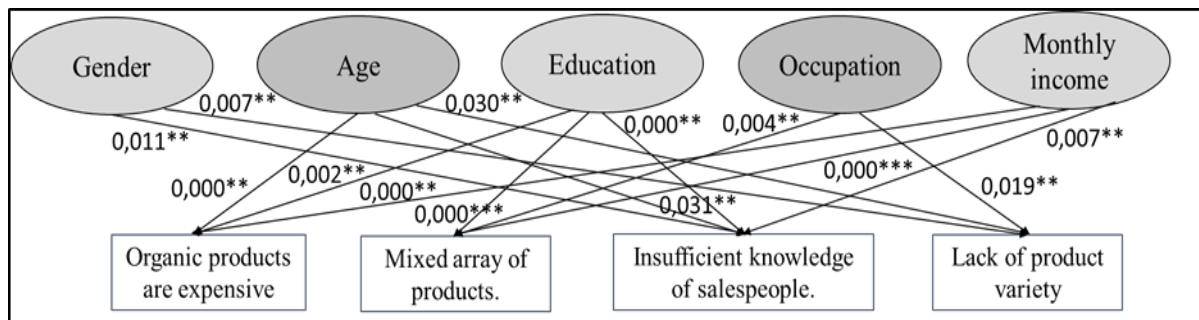


Fig. 5. Relationship between the user profile and negative features

At the end of the survey she conducted in Istanbul markets, Karaman [32] found that organic products are generally expensive. Still, it is possible to buy these products from the organic market at a more affordable price compared to the markets. Padel & Foster, [33] Although the discussions on the barriers to purchasing organic products have focused on the price point, access and availability issues have also come to the fore. Ersun & Arslan [34] The regular supply of fresh vegetables and fruits to organic food stores, natural food stores, or other retail sales channels is not possible due to high logistics costs hindering the increase in sales. While Gürler [22] states that the three factors that most affect the preferences of consumers during food shopping are price, quality, and being healthy, respectively, she states that income is important in the prominence of price and that the increase or decrease in consumers' income plays a decisive role in healthy food choices. Kenanoğlu & Karahan, [35] The high prices of organic products can be reduced to lower levels by eliminating the ineffective intermediaries between producers and consumers or by delivering the products directly to the consumers.

CONCLUSION

Consequently, our survey study conducted on the organic markets of the city of Istanbul reveals that individuals' interest in organic products has increased. They pay attention to healthy nutrition and consume organic products consciously. To ensure the satisfaction of the visitors who use organic markets, it is necessary to increase the product range, arrange the products carefully, and make the employees occasionally participate in organic training programs to

eliminate the negativities they indicate for the markets. The consciousness of consumers can be increased by broadcasting public service advertisements on televisions on what an organic/natural product is, its differences from traditional products, and its benefits to health and the environment, or by educating children and parents in schools. The series of programs consumers watch constantly emphasize how important these products are consumed, and brief information about the products can be given [36]. Also, since it is seen that people visit organic markets with a certain income level, it is possible to suggest that the prices be reduced as much as possible and bring them closer to the conventional product by increasing the production incentives of the government so that the organic products reach more people, for the individuals to eat healthier. Moreover, it is seen that the consumption of organic products is made for healthy nutrition even by the most conscious people in Turkey. As a result, awareness-raising training should be provided to consumers, and it should be ensured that they consume organic products to cause less harm to nature and healthy nutrition.

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