

Market trends for organic or low input foods from marginal pastures

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Key words : quality foods , town markets

Introduction There is increased interest of customers for quality foods produced in environmental friendly agricultural systems that have less chemical residuals and better tastes than foods produced with intensive agriculture (Prache et al ., 2005) . These foods are actually produced in very similar ways to what was done up to the 2nd world war , that is before the rapid infussion of intensive agriculture based on high inputs . Currenty organic foods get added values , especially in town markets , and farmers get higher incomes with these quality crops than with larger stocks produced by intensive methods , consequently further infussion of these foods can contribute to improve social and economical conditions in marginal areas . Moreover , the availability of such quality foods aids in increasing the number of customer-days in Tuscan agri-tourism farms with further incomes for farmers . Our research has investigated the changes that have happened in the infussion and the prices of organic foods in 3 important towns of Tuscany from 2003 to 2007 .

Materials and methods We repeated a research study done in 2003 (Pardini and Longhi , 2003) , comparing the results of that year with those in 2007 . We investigated food availability and prices in 65 shops and supermarkets randomly chosen , all located in 15 municipalities within 80 km from the town centres of Firenze , Prato and Pistoia . The characteristics measured were : availability of organic foods (at least 5 different foods) ; prices of organic and conventional foods (on the average of 10 fruit types , 11 vegetables , 4 pulses , 7 meat parts and salami , milk) ; and reasons for presence or eventual absence of organic foods (interviews to managers and owners of the shops) .

Results and discussion Organic food availability has not changed in the period 2003-2007 ; in the study area organic foods are still available in 100% of the towns large supermarkets (same percentage of 2003) and in 96% of out-town supermarkets (95% in 2003) . On the other hand , organic foods remain available in just a very few family run shops on town peripheries or in small villages , or such small shops have little variety of organic foods .

Organic food prices are now 15-40% higher than conventional foods , consequently less expensive than it was in 2003 (in 2003 prices of organic were 32-67% higher than foods from intensive agriculture) .

The reasons for organic foods infussion into supermarkets is due to the lack of trust of people in foods from intensive agriculture , and the limited difference of prices . On the contrary organic foods are not common in small shops where customers buy just little amounts for daily needs and , on such little quantities , people prefer to spend less than to have good quality .

Conclusions Availability of organic foods has not increased , nor has it been reduced . They retain importance in supermarkets , but they are not common in small shops that offer little variety of foods and where people buy few items in small amounts . Moreover , the infussion of integrated agriculture has reduced chemical residuals in other foods , consequently people now trust the foods produced intensively , some what more than in the past , when dangerous contaminants were found in some imported foods .

The emerging of organic agriculture has probably helped the infussion of a low input integrated agriculture with benefits for the environment and the customers , and it can still help the survival of agriculture and husbandry in marginal areas with little productivity .

References

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