

KNOWLEDGE LEVEL, PERCEPTION AND PURCHASING INTENTION TOWARDS ORGANIC FRUITS AND VEGETABLES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Background: The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) describes organic farming as *“a manufacturing system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles modified to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with unfavorable effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation, and science to advance the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved”* (IFOAM, 2011). Ecologically based practices such as biological pest management and composting are some of the techniques adopted in organic fruit and vegetable production.

Objective: The objective of this study is: **(1)** understand the attitude of local consumers towards buying organic food products and the possibility of the development of a viable organic buying market in Trinidad and Tobago **(2)** explore the potential demand in New Grant for organically produced fruits and vegetables **(3)** determine more about consumer knowledge and perception about organic food **(4)** to understand the influencing factors in the organic market development.

Design: This study presents the results of a survey on the subject of consumer knowledge level, perceptions and purchasing intention in New Grant/Tableland. A questionnaire was used to determine consumer perceptions towards organic foods, their knowledge level and potential for consumption. A total of 125 consumers above the age of 18yrs living in New Grant/Tableland participated in the research.

Results: The results of the survey revealed that participants seem to have high knowledge levels about organic fruits and vegetables. In terms of demographic variables analyzed in study, education was highly correlated with knowledge level and intention to purchase. Variations with respect to their age and income level were recorded when assessing knowledge level. Participants with no monthly salary had a significantly lower knowledge level. Environmental and health concerns are strong motivating factors in organics' knowledge level; perceptions and

intention to purchase. The findings of the survey confirm the significance of price as a barrier. A significant number of respondents had a negative perception about the affordability of organic fruits and vegetables. However, the intention to purchase was mainly based on making organic foods more affordable..

Conclusion: Employment status does not contribute to the similarities or differences between the various group examined in the study. Gender, job and education determined if participants consumed organic foods. Overall there is not a significant correlation between demographics and knowledge level, perception and intention